

Circles of Knowledge:  
Intellectual Relationships in Mamlūk Syria, 1250-1516 C.E.

Honors Research Thesis

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## MAP OF THE MAMLŪK SULTANATE



Source: <http://forum.paradoxplaza.com/forum/showthread.php?271360-The-de-Lusignan-Dream-Cyprus-1337/page2>

## **Introduction**

This study seeks to analyze intellectual relationships in Greater Syria (encompassing present-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian territories) during a provocative period of its history: the Mamlūk Sultanate, which ruled from the mid-13<sup>th</sup> through the early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. During this period, the lands once unified under the Umayyad and ‘Abbāsīd Caliphates between the 7th and the 13th centuries experienced decentralization under powerful provincial rulers and incursions from both the East and West. The Mamlūk Sultanate came to power as a caste of primarily Turkish, and later Circassian, slave soldiers, overthrowing the dynasty that had imported them to serve in their army and building their own form of power based on a non-hereditary military aristocracy. The Sultanate maintained control over Egypt and Greater Syria for almost three centuries, in the face of external and internal struggles, until it was finally overtaken by the Ottoman Empire in 1516-1517.

Where the historiography of the Mamlūk Sultanate is concerned, Syria is understudied as most research has focused on Egypt, and more particularly Cairo, the capital of the Sultanate. Much of the primary source documentation comes from or highlights Egypt. However, Syria, and in particular the cities of Damascus, Jerusalem, and Aleppo, was an influential region in the Sultanate, and the educated elite who were active there had a great deal of authority. Compared to other regions of the Middle East during the Middle Ages, Syria seems to have generated a considerable amount of sources for political history, but scholars have had to tease out information about social and cultural practices from the existing chronicles and biographical dictionaries of the period. These sources say surprisingly little about various aspects of society,

such as the role of women that are more commonly noted in sources from periods before and after Mamlūk reign. In addition, because more information on this and other subjects is available for Egypt, I have extrapolated certain details from the Egyptian case in order to make this analysis more complete. For example, Jonathan Berkey's *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* has been invaluable to this study, especially for chapters dealing with women and non-elite members of society. Whenever possible, though, I have sought to incorporate information or examples that pertain directly to Greater Syria.

Socio-cultural studies of the medieval Islamic world are becoming more popular, yet intellectual history is relatively understudied. When it is analyzed, it is primarily with regard to the educated elite. An example of such a study is Michael Chamberlain's *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350*, which focuses on the transmission and use of knowledge for social purposes among the upper classes. However, the role of education in the medieval Middle East among all socio-economic classes is a pertinent line of study as intellectual life can tell us a great deal about different segments of society. It is this more inclusive aspect of education that this study seeks to examine, particularly how education allowed people to connect with one another and to connect with different classes, ethnicities, and even genders. The relationships that were formed because of education, whether it occurred in a school, a home, or on the streets of Damascus, could cross social boundaries that were otherwise fairly static.

Before launching an analysis of society during this period, a brief historical introduction is necessary to gain an overarching view of conditions influencing the rise and rule of the Mamlūk Sultanate. Afterward, I will break down my discussion into individual groups/classes of

people in order to analyze the role of education among these groups, how they transmitted knowledge, and their relationships with one another. The groups include students and teachers in the traditional educational system, the Mamlūk and regional elites, Sufis, women, and the common people. Throughout the paper, I will reference how the groups interacted with one another through education and how and what kind of relationships formed among them. From this study, I have found that due to the way scholars transmitted knowledge in Islamic society, and due to Syria's relatively peripheral position within the Mamlūk domains, intellectual relationships in Mamlūk Syria formed within complex social circles and encompassed a variety of classes and groups rather than being based on affiliation with a certain school or institution.

## Chapter 1: Historical Background

### The Rise of the Mamlūks

The Mamlūk Sultanate existed during a time of intense change in the Islamic world. Crusader invasions from the West, Mongol invasions from the East, the spread of the Black Plague, and Turkish migrations drastically altered the political, social, and cultural landscape of the lands once ruled by the faltering ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate (750-1258). An understanding of the history of Turkish migrations (the majority of which took place in the 11<sup>th</sup> century) and the importation of Mamlūks, the polities that came to power during and after ‘Abbāsīd rule, and issues facing the Mamlūk Sultanate itself is necessary before attempting a discussion of its society and educational systems.

Nomadic peoples consistently posed a threat to empires in China, the Middle East, and beyond through raids and invasions, yet they greatly influenced the political and social environment of the medieval Middle East. Robert Irwin speculates that periodic drought, high birthrate, and population density, on the one hand, and Chinese intervention to weaken nomads on their borders, on the other, led Turks to move west.<sup>1</sup> As they expanded, the early Muslim empires encountered not only Turkish confederations but also the Chinese. In 751, the ‘Abbāsīds cemented their control with their victory against the Chinese at the Battle of Talas, after the Turkish mercenaries whom the Chinese employed switched sides. Over time, Turks entered Islamic lands as immigrants or were imported as Mamlūks, slave soldiers for the Islamic armies.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages: the Early Mamlūk Sultanate, 1250-1382* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 2. <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.00900>.

Mamlūks were not menial slaves; they were a vital part of the military and had the opportunity to rise to high administrative positions. As slaves, they were able to go through intense training in the military arts and in Islam and Islamic sciences. Irwin comments, “We find Mamlūks acting as the equerries, cupbearers and falconers of the rulers and we find them serving also as provincial governors, major-domos of the royal household or treasurers.”<sup>2</sup> Slavery as a Mamlūk meant the possibility of a successful career, not degradation as a servant. Those who achieved high administrative positions sometimes were manumitted and sometimes were not (though under the Mamlūk Sultanate, they were usually freed). They also learned loyalty to their masters, and sometimes master and Mamlūk became as close as father and son.<sup>3</sup> Because Mamlūks were a non-hereditary elite, promotion through the ranks was due to merit and not bloodline, and they also were kept from passing on wealth through land ownership, though some tried with varying degrees of success.<sup>4</sup>

The practice of importing Mamlūks deserves some discussion, as this paved the way for the eventual takeover in Egypt and Greater Syria of the Mamlūk Sultanate. The Islamic armies had enlisted non-Arabs from the time of the Caliph ‘Umar (634-644) due to the rapid expansion of the Muslim empire, first employing soldiers from the fallen Sassanian Empire.<sup>5</sup> The exact date when Mamlūks began to be imported is unknown, although scholars guess that they may have been integrated into the army before the Umayyad Caliphate (661-750) even came to power.<sup>6</sup> Muslim rulers imported Mamlūks from the Eurasian steppe primarily because of the

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<sup>2</sup> Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages*, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages*, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages*, 6.

<sup>5</sup> David Ayalon, “The Muslim City and the Mamlūk Military Aristocracy,” *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 2 (1968): 311-319, reprinted in *Studies on the Mamlūks of Egypt: 1250-1517* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1977), 315.

<sup>6</sup> Ayalon, “The Muslim City and the Mamlūk Military Aristocracy,” 315.



large number of nomadic populations there from which to recruit military manpower.<sup>7</sup>

Additionally, the Turks' upbringing on the steppes led to their being valued for their military capabilities. They could also easily be converted to Islam (unlike most Christians) and in fact were among the earliest converts after the Islamic expansion out of the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>8</sup>

Before conversion, many of them followed shamanistic belief systems or certain forms of Buddhism. The Mamlūk system relied on nomadic chieftains and kinsmen who were willing to sell their young men, as well as captives, to perpetuate the military elite.<sup>9</sup> Nomads did this because of the high prices they could receive, the occasional destitution of their populations, the desire to sell prisoners they had captured, and the motive to supply slaves instead of paying taxes.<sup>10</sup> The polities employing Mamlūks continually struggled to maintain a consistent supply of troops.

In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Mamlūks became so prominent in the Islamic world that they made up the majority of the army. The 'Abbāsīd Caliphs al-Ma'mūn (r. 813--833) and al-Mu'taṣim (r. 833-841) made particular efforts to import Turks from Transoxiana.<sup>11</sup> Al-Ma'mūn most likely began importing Turks because of the need of a larger army to protect Islamic lands.<sup>12</sup> Al-Mu'taṣim brought them into Islamic lands in even greater numbers. During his reign, he built a separate city, Sāmarrā, north of Baghdad on the Tigris River, for his new army apart from the

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<sup>7</sup> Ayalon, "The Muslim City and the Mamlūk Military Aristocracy," 314.

<sup>8</sup> David Ayalon, "The European-Asiatic Steppe: A Major Reservoir of Power for the Islamic World," in *Proceedings of the 25<sup>th</sup> Congress of Orientalists* (Moscow: n.p., 1963), vol. 2, 47-52; reprinted in *Studies on the Mamlūks of Egypt: 1250-1517* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1977), 47.

<sup>9</sup> David Ayalon, "Preliminary Remarks on the Mamlūk Military Institution in Islam," in *War, Technology and Society in the Middle East*, eds. V.J. Parry and M.E. Yapp (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 44-58, reprinted in *Studies on the Mamlūks of Egypt: 1250-1517* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1977), 56.

<sup>10</sup> David Ayalon, "Mamlūk," *Encyclopedia of Islam* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2006 [database online]; available from [http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam\\_COM-0657](http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_COM-0657); internet; accessed 14 Feb 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew Gordon, *The Breaking of a Thousand Swords: A History of the Turkish Military of Samarra (A.H. 200-275/815-889 C.E.)* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 21.

<sup>12</sup> Gordon, *The Breaking of a Thousand Swords*, 42.

court. Matthew Gordon describes it as a “means to consolidate power on the part of a new potentate,” as well as to overcome the opposition that the people of Baghdad had to the Turks.<sup>13</sup> The reigns of these two caliphs set the stage for the spread of Turks throughout the Islamic lands as well as the system of patronage and factionalism that tended to characterize the Mamlūk military system.

During the early decades of ‘Abbāsīd rule, the state had been relatively centralized, controlled by the ‘Abbāsīd caliphs in Baghdad and their regional governors.<sup>14</sup> By the mid-10<sup>th</sup> century, however, the caliphate was experiencing significant decentralization. Eventually the caliphs came to retain a largely symbolic authority while various provincial polities maintained real control. Many of these, such as the Sāmānids (819-999) and Ghaznavids (962-1040), came to rely heavily on Mamlūk soldiers.<sup>15</sup> In fact, the Ghaznavids themselves originated as Turkish mamlūks in the service of the Sāmānids, but they rebelled and took over their territory in Khurasan. Turks came into Islamic territories in even greater waves by the 10<sup>th</sup> century in the form of migrations. The Seljūks (1040-1194) were Turkic nomads who converted to Islam in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century, then defeated the Ghaznavids militarily, crossed the Oxus River and occupied Khurasan. By 1055, they had occupied Baghdad.<sup>16</sup> This Turkish power ruled in Iran and Iraq until 1194, and a splinter group of them took over Anatolia, where they took land from the Byzantines before wresting the Hijaz and Greater Syria from the Fāṭimid caliphate (909-1171).

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<sup>13</sup> Gordon, *The Breaking of a Thousand Swords*, 55.

<sup>14</sup> Erik Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition: ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī and the Rise of the Islamic Mystical Brotherhoods* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 17.

<sup>15</sup> Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages*, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages*, 10.

Syria during this period was divided, as some were loyal to the Ismā‘īlī Shī‘ite Fāṭimids while others were loyal to the Sunni Seljūks.<sup>17</sup> In the late 11<sup>th</sup> century, the Crusaders began to threaten this region, and the various regimes were unable to cooperate to properly fend off their attacks. Zangī, Seljūk governor of Mosul and Aleppo from 1087-1094, took back Edessa (also known as Urfa) in southeastern Anatolia, which had fallen to the Crusaders, and attempted to gain control of and consolidate Greater Syria. After his death, his son Nūr al-Dīn b. Zangī ruled Aleppo and eventually took Damascus. Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (d. 1193), his client, encouraged Nūr al-Dīn to permit him to advance to Cairo, where he overthrew the Fāṭimid dynasty in 1171. Three years later, he declared independence from the Zangids in Damascus and advanced into Syria, where he not only occupied Damascus but also defeated the Crusaders in Jerusalem and other parts of Palestine.<sup>18</sup> He founded the Ayyūbid dynasty, which ruled Egypt and Syria until they were overtaken by the Mamlūks in 1250.

Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn heavily imported Mamlūks to repel the threats from East and West. Many sources mention how crucial they were in stemming the tide of Crusader forces.<sup>19</sup> As well, the Ayyūbids used the *wāfidiyya*, the Turkic immigrants displaced by the Mongol invasions, as part of their army. Al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb (d. 1249) invited them to assist in the Ayyūbid efforts against the Franks, although the Ayyūbids did not allow them to be assimilated to the populations in Cairo and Damascus after the battle as the *wāfidiyya* wanted. Instead, they were forced to settle in other regions along the Mediterranean coast and eventually dispersed.<sup>20</sup> Many of these Turks were residents of the Kipchak steppe, extending from western China to what is

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<sup>17</sup> Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages*, 11.

<sup>18</sup> Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages*, 11.

<sup>19</sup> Ayalon, "Mamlūk."

<sup>20</sup> Ayalon, "The Wadifiya in the Mamlūk Kingdom," *Islamic Culture* 25 (1951): 91-104; reprinted in *Studies on the Mamlūks of Egypt: 1250-1517* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1977), 94.

now Ukraine, who had been displaced by the Mongol armies after they began to move westward. Najm al-Dīn's elite Mamlūk fighting force, the *Bahriyya*, was primarily made up of Kipchak Turks.<sup>21</sup> When Najm al-Dīn died right before an anti-Crusader campaign in 1250, the Mamlūks took the opportunity to seize control of Egypt.

Najm al-Dīn's son and heir, Tūrānshāh, was initially put on the throne after his father's death, but he angered the powerful Bahri Mamlūks by his appointments to various positions of leadership. As a result, he was deposed, and the Mamlūk elite spent about a decade vying for power. In addition to these internal concerns, the Syrian towns continued to experience Mongol attacks and were difficult to bring under Mamlūk control. In 1260, the Mamlūks defeated the Mongol army at the Battle of 'Ayn Jālūt. The army the Mamlūks faced was depleted, due to the death of the Mongol Khan, Möngke, in 1259. Hülegü, who was leading the Mongol advance, had gone back to the distant Mongol capital of Karakorum with most of his army to follow the battle for succession.<sup>22</sup> Even so, many had considered the Mongol armies to be unstoppable until this point. This victory solidified the legitimacy of the Mamlūk Sultanate, though the Mongols continued to harass Syrian towns for decades afterward. In 1260, Baybars, who had been one of the commanders of the Mamlūk attack, ascended to the throne after the ruler Qutuz was killed.<sup>23</sup> Though the Sultanate in the century after endured internal strife and attacks by Crusaders and Mongols, it was firmly established as a powerful entity between East and West.

As Ayalon comments, "The Mamlūk military aristocracy acquired a thoroughly exclusive character at a very early stage."<sup>24</sup> Those who did not fulfill the requirements to be among their ranks were excluded, and, furthermore, they found themselves largely cut off from the native

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<sup>21</sup> Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages*, 18.

<sup>22</sup> Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages*, 32.

<sup>23</sup> Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages*, 34.

<sup>24</sup> Ayalon, "The Muslim City and the Mamlūk Military Aristocracy," 314.

population because they were of a different ethno-regional origin and spoke a different language. The ways in which Mamlūks gained legitimacy and social capital with the local peoples will be discussed later in this paper.

As the aristocracy was non-hereditary, from the beginning there was contention over succession to the Mamlūk throne. Almost every sultan tried to install his son on the throne, but this rarely succeeded because the father's circle of powerful amīrs would overthrow the son in order to put another Mamlūk on the throne. One exception to this pattern is the sons of Qalāwūn (r. 1277-1290), one of the early Kipchak Turkish sultans and, like Baybars, a mamlūk of Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb. After he died, his son Khalīl (d. 1293) took the throne relatively unopposed.<sup>25</sup> Khalīl was then followed by his brother, al-Nāsir Muḥammad, who ruled until 1341 (though he was deposed twice during his reign, then reinstated). Some of their descendants, both sons and grandsons, also came to be sultans of Egypt and Syria. However, this family aside, the sultan's son who aimed for the throne was usually quickly defeated. When a sultan gained the throne, he immediately put his own Mamlūks into positions of power by replacing those of his predecessor to keep himself surrounded by people loyal to him.<sup>26</sup> Thus the Mamlūk system was essentially a military oligarchy.

## **Circassians**

One of the most significant events that occurred internally in the sultanate was the changeover from Kipchak Turks to Circassians as the military aristocracy. Mamlūks from

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<sup>25</sup> Ira Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 76, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu>.

<sup>26</sup> David Ayalon, "The Circassians in the Mamlūk Kingdom," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 69 (1949), 146. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/594989>.

Circassia, a region in the northern Caucasus, along the Black Sea, had played a role in Mamlūk Sultanate politics since the late thirteenth century, when Qalāwūn recruited a Circassian regiment.<sup>27</sup> However, scholars mention the Circassians even earlier than that, for Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb is recorded to have purchased Mamlūks from Circassia at the end of the Ayyūbid period.<sup>28</sup> The vast steppe inhabited by the Kipchaks went into a decline during the Mongol invasions, which led to civil wars and ultimately to the depletion of the population by the armies of Tīmūr in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.<sup>29</sup> As well, during the later part of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Mongol Golden Horde in Russia began to fragment, leading to internal conflicts in the region.<sup>30</sup> The depopulation of the Kipchak homeland in Central Asia and the civil wars in that region may have encouraged the Mamlūk sultans to turn to another recruiting ground, namely Circassia, for their importation of slaves. Sultan Qalāwūn, as noted above, established a Circassian regiment known as the Burjīs, because their barracks was a tower (Arabic, *burj*) in Cairo’s citadel.<sup>31</sup>

Other Mamlūks were fearful of the power that the Circassians had, and several times there were instances of the Circassians trying to seize power or of other factions trying to purge the land of their influence.<sup>32</sup> Finally, in 1382, the Circassian amīr Barqūq was proclaimed sultan, a turn of events that officially ushered in the predominance of the Circassian Mamlūks.<sup>33</sup> He purchased many Circassian Mamlūks (as well as Mamlūks of other provenances) during his reign, many of whom took the throne after he died.<sup>34</sup> During the Circassian period, ethno-

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<sup>27</sup> Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages*, 157.

<sup>28</sup> Ayalon, “The Circassians in the Mamlūk Kingdom,” 137.

<sup>29</sup> Ayalon, “Mamlūk.”

<sup>30</sup> Ayalon, “The Circassians in the Mamlūk Kingdom,” 136.

<sup>31</sup> Ayalon, “The Circassians in the Mamlūk Kingdom,” 137.

<sup>32</sup> Ayalon, “The Circassians in the Mamlūk Kingdom,” 138.

<sup>33</sup> Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages*, 158.

<sup>34</sup> Ayalon, “The Circassians in the Mamlūk Kingdom,” 140.

regional solidarity was much more prominent than before, and people of Circassian descent were prized.<sup>35</sup> Sultans and other powerful individuals would often import their relatives from Circassia to fill prominent positions in the government, angering Mamlūks of other ethno-regional origins.<sup>36</sup>

## Plague

The outbreaks of plague in the Middle East during the Circassian period should be discussed as the disease recurred many times, affected different segments of the population, and produced severe economic and political consequences. As Michael W. Dols explains, some scholars think that the decimation of the Plague of Justinian, which hit the Mediterranean in the 6<sup>th</sup> century C.E., helped pave the way for the Islamic conquests because of the reduction in population in Byzantine territory and the numerical reductions in the Byzantine and Sasanian armies.<sup>37</sup> The Muslims' first encounter with the plague in the 7<sup>th</sup> century shaped how they responded to it in the future when, during the 14<sup>th</sup> century, it arrived in the Islamic world once again with devastating consequences.<sup>38</sup> In the Middle East, many waves of plague were pneumonic rather than bubonic, meaning that they were more deadly yet manifested fewer visible symptoms, notably buboes. Much of the Muslim population thought that, since only God could cause disease, it was useless to flee the plague because God already had decided their fates.<sup>39</sup> Many also considered the plague a form of martyrdom given to them by God, correlating *jihād* with death from the plague. Thus, those who fled plague-ridden cities were

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<sup>35</sup> Ayalon, "The Circassians in the Mamlūk Kingdom," 140.

<sup>36</sup> Ayalon, "The Circassians in the Mamlūk Kingdom," 144.

<sup>37</sup> Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 18.

<sup>38</sup> Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East*, 13.

<sup>39</sup> Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East*, 110.

sometimes compared to cowards fleeing battle from which one could attain paradise through martyrdom.<sup>40</sup> Practically speaking, however, many towns and villages were abandoned as most of the inhabitants fell victim to the plague. The plague occurred several times during the Umayyad and ‘Abbāsīd periods, although less severely and frequently in the latter.<sup>41</sup>

The plague recurred in the Mamlūk Sultanate from 1348 through the Ottoman conquest in 1516-17.<sup>42</sup> The devastating outbreak in Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> century hit the Middle East as it traveled westward from the Crimea through the Mediterranean. Dols explains that the most immediate outcome of the plague was rural and urban depopulation, and this was certainly the case in the outbreaks of plague that occurred during the reign of the Mamlūks.<sup>43</sup> For example, Ibn Taghrī Birdī, in his history of Egypt, describes how in Cairo during one month in 1419, 7,652 people died.<sup>44</sup> At the time, Cairo’s population was about 150,000-200,000, making such a decrease in population in only one month all the more significant.<sup>45</sup> The Mamlūks and other foreigners were the most susceptible to the plague because they had not built up as much immunity as the local population had.<sup>46</sup> Though it is uncertain exactly how many died, a good number of Mamlūk soldiers were killed in each epidemic. Ibn Taghrī Birdī gives an eyewitness account of this phenomenon, saying, “As for the Mamlūks, slaves, slave girls, and servants who died in our home, they cannot be numbered.”<sup>47</sup> Some scholars believe that this reduction of the

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<sup>40</sup> Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East*, 113.

<sup>41</sup> Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East*, 27.

<sup>42</sup> Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East*, 222.

<sup>43</sup> Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East*, 10.

<sup>44</sup> Abu’l-Mahasin Yusuf Ibn Taghrī Birdī. *History of Egypt, 1382-1469 A.D. Part III, 1412-1422 A.D.*, trans. William Popper, vol. 17 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), 66.

<sup>45</sup> André Raymond, “Cairo’s Area and Population in the Early Fifteenth Century,” *Murqanas* 2 (1984), 30, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1523053>.

<sup>46</sup> David Ayalon, “The Plague and its Effects upon the Mamlūk Army,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1946), 67-73; reprinted in *Studies on the Mamlūks of Egypt: 1250-1517* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1977), 69.

<sup>47</sup> Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *History of Egypt*, vol. 18 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), 71.



army was a factor in its continual decline and the eventual takeover by the Ottoman Empire in 1516-17.<sup>48</sup> Because of plague, the Mamlūk military expeditions were disrupted. Dols mentions that for a decade after the Black Death pandemic, the Mamlūks did not engage in any major military conflicts, most likely because of the reduction in military capacity.<sup>49</sup> The decline of the *'iqṭā* system, whereby revenues from specified plots of land were granted to amīrs and other officials, increased with plague outbreaks.<sup>50</sup> At times there was even confusion as to who owned which properties because so many people had died, leading to economic disruption.<sup>51</sup>

Peasants responsible for growing food, keeping up irrigation channels, and maintaining the land also died in large numbers. Many animals also perished due to plague, which hurt cultivation and agricultural production. Ibn Taghrī Birdī, quoting al-Maqrīzī, states that because there were so many sick and dying, people did not have time for buying and selling in the markets.<sup>52</sup> Dols comments that as the years went by, the prices of goods and salaries changed as a result of the plague.<sup>53</sup> The price of agricultural goods initially increased because of the decrease in harvests, but as the population as a whole decreased, the smaller harvest was sufficient to feed fewer people.<sup>54</sup> Manufactured goods, on the other hand, increased in price because there were fewer workers to produce these goods; housed in relatively close quarters, the urban population was more vulnerable to the spread of plague.<sup>55</sup> Ibn Taghrī Birdī notes the inflation in prices that took place as soon as the plague recurred in Egypt.<sup>56</sup> As can be expected,

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<sup>48</sup> Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East*, 188.

<sup>49</sup> Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East*, 192.

<sup>50</sup> Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East*, 270.

<sup>51</sup> Ayalon, "The Plague and its Effects upon the Mamlūk Army," 72-73.

<sup>52</sup> Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *History of Egypt*, vol. 18, 73.

<sup>53</sup> Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East*, 11.

<sup>54</sup> Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East*, 260.

<sup>55</sup> Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East*, 261-262.

<sup>56</sup> Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *History of Egypt, Part III*, vol. 22 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), 95.

the price of any medicine or good that was thought to help fend off the plague or help those already suffering increased during times of plague.<sup>57</sup> Commerce declined as population had been reduced, agriculture declined, and there were fewer people to make or sell goods.<sup>58</sup> Thus, the plague had a significant impact on the economy of the sultanate as well as its army, ruling class, and society.

## **Decline?**

Medieval writers often called the later Mamlūk period a decline, though that may be because some, like Ibn Taghrī Birdī, were descendents of Kipchak Mamlūks and were not objective in their reporting. David Ayalon agrees with this perception, citing “the exhaustion of Egypt’s rich resources due to the predatory economic system of the Mamlūks,” “deterioration of discipline in the army,” “the insufficient use of new methods of warfare,” “the continuous decrease of the population in the native countries of the Mamlūks [presumably both Circassia and the Kipchak steppe],” and “the outbreaks of plague” as causes of the alleged decline.<sup>59</sup>

However, more recent scholarship suggests that there may be more to later Mamlūk history. Carl Petry asserts that “the chroniclers’ record implies less a precipitous decline in agrarian output...crafting of commodities, or commercial marketing than a growing resignation to harassment which discouraged experimentation but promoted languor.”<sup>60</sup> Yet this economic system succeeded for some time in supporting the Mamlūk institution that was “conditioned to

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<sup>57</sup> Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East*, 258.

<sup>58</sup> Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East*, 279.

<sup>59</sup> Ayalon, “The Plague and its Effects upon the Mamlūk Army,” 67.

<sup>60</sup> Carl Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians? The Last Mamlūk Sultans and Egypt’s Waning as Great Power*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 103-104.

living beyond its means.”<sup>61</sup> During the later Mamlūk period, as well, international relations had changed. The sultanate experienced conflicts with Tīmūr and his descendants, with the Portuguese and their commercialism, and with the Ottomans, who would ultimately conquer them in 1516-17. After the defeat of the Crusaders and Mongols, the Mamlūks were reluctant to engage in conflicts as their manpower was costly to obtain and took years to properly train; thus they sought coexistence with these new polities instead of conflict.<sup>62</sup> However, some Mamlūk sultans made attempts to change the military system or alter it to foster new technologies. Sultan Qānsūh al-Ghawrī (r. 1501-1516) tried to introduce cannon, revive a lancers’ unit, and create another military unit to combat outside pressures.<sup>63</sup> Instead of overt decline, some scholars believe that there was a desire on the part of the Mamlūk sultans to simply remain in stasis to try to perpetuate the system that they had in place, though some did make attempts to change with the times.

## **Conclusion**

This brief introduction aims to give an overview of factors leading up to the Mamlūk takeover of Egypt and Greater Syria, important events that occurred during Mamlūk rule, and factors that influenced the Mamlūks’ alleged decline and their fall to the Ottoman Empire. The Turkish migrations and importation of Mamlūks that occurred between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries allowed a class of slave soldiers to eventually control a large portion of the ‘Abbāsīd Empire. The predecessors to the Mamlūks, the Ayyūbids, dealt with concerns that the Mamlūks inherited, such as the Crusades, and by their heavy importation of Kipchak Mamlūks, they unwittingly

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<sup>61</sup> Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians?*, 103.

<sup>62</sup> Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians?*, 32.

<sup>63</sup> Petry, *Protectors or Praetorians?*, 190.

paved the way for their own fall. The Mamlūk sultans had to deal with the Crusades and the new threat of the Mongols, as well as internal challenges, such as the difficulty of succession in a non-hereditary aristocracy, revolts, and outbreaks of the plague that decimated their population and economy over two centuries. The following analysis of intellectual relationships in Mamlūk Syria relies upon an understanding of the overarching cultural milieu in which the individuals concerned operated.

## Chapter 2: Traditional Student-Teacher Relationships

The pursuit of knowledge is an important aspect of Islamic society. One of the duties of a Muslim is to study the Qur'ān and the *ḥadīth* (traditions of the Prophet), and this injunction extended to the poor, women, and converts to Islam. It was possible for women to study with shaykhs, to be teachers, and to attend madrasas, although this was not a common occurrence. Education among women will be discussed specifically toward the end of this paper. The reverence toward people of learning, the religious elite called the '*ulamā*', propelled them to the highest levels of society. The function of educational institutions, how academic appointments were given out, and how knowledge was transmitted can show how and why intellectual relationships developed, and their importance in Islamic education.

### The *Madrasa*

Before the development of the institution known as the *madrasa*, students and teachers would meet in the mosque. There, prominent scholars would lead teaching circles called, in the singular, *ḥalqa* or *majlis* for students.<sup>64</sup> As education was intimately connected with religion, this was a practical arrangement. However, through the eighth and the ninth centuries, Islamic law became systematized and students of Islamic sciences began to require a more extensive education than had been offered previously.<sup>65</sup> It became necessary to house the students near the mosque so they could easily access the teachers over a longer period of time, and as a result,

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<sup>64</sup> Jonathan Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo: A Social History of Islamic Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 7.

<sup>65</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 7.

hostel-like accommodations were built.<sup>66</sup> By the tenth and eleventh centuries, these complexes had evolved into the madrasa. The root of the word is the Arabic *d-r-s*, which means “to study.” It was historically a place where Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) was taught, along with theology (*kalām*), *hadīth*, Qur’ānic exegesis, Arabic grammar, and other topics.<sup>67</sup> Schools would be associated with either one or more of the Sunni legal schools: the Ḥanafī, Ḥanbalī, Mālikī, or Shāfi‘ī. The institution spread quickly throughout the Islamic world, and between the end of the twelfth and the mid-thirteenth century, sixty new madrasas were built in Damascus.<sup>68</sup>

Madrasas were not government-supported institutions, though members of the ruling elite often founded them and supported them financially. Wealthy individuals would establish and endow madrasas and other religious institutions through a legal institution called *waqf*.<sup>69</sup> *Waqf* allowed the founder to establish and provide for the upkeep of a religious or charitable institution, like a madrasa, by allocating the revenue of a specific property or properties to the establishment. In the case of the madrasa, *waqf* would allow the founder or overseer to support students and give stipends to teachers as well. However, because a variety of individuals were responsible for founding and supporting these institutions, they were not uniform. As Berkey points out, “The schools that were established varied considerably in physical size, in the preference they allotted to one particular rite, in their commitment to Sufi devotions as well as rigorous academic work, and above all in the value of their endowments (and the income they generated) and the quality of education they offered.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 7.

<sup>67</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 6-7.

<sup>68</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 8.

<sup>69</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 8.

<sup>70</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 15.

Waqf also allowed people to protect their property; because it was a religious endowment in perpetuity, properties attached to a waqf could not be seized by the state on the founder's death.<sup>71</sup> Founders would name their heirs as supervisors in order to pass on their wealth in a relatively secure way. Founding religious or charitable institutions also allowed them to engage in the religious and social life of the community.

In addition to employing teachers and housing students, madrasas and other religious and educational institutions hired many other individuals to keep up the buildings and perform a variety of support functions. Berkey mentions a librarian, men in charge of lighting and extinguishing candles, someone to burn incense, a gatekeeper, physical laborers, and more.<sup>72</sup> Other religious officials and secretaries could also reside in and benefit from a madrasa.<sup>73</sup> Most waqf deeds also stipulated that outside people could come into a madrasa to attend lectures and benefit from the resources it provided.<sup>74</sup> Thus the endowment of an institution of learning could help a community spiritually and also financially as it opened jobs to the public.

With this being said, one must be careful not to place too much emphasis on the madrasa as a focal point of Islamic education. The exact definition of a madrasa and why some buildings and not others in early Islamic history were called this is not fully understood, and madrasas were not the only means by which one could obtain a religious education.<sup>75</sup> The functions of the *jāmi'* (congregational mosque), the *masjid* (mosque for daily prayer), the *khānqāh* (Sufi convent), and the madrasa often overlapped, so distinguishing one from another can be difficult. The institutions all served multiple functions, including sites of education, centers for public

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<sup>71</sup> Michael Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus, 1190-1350* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 51.

<sup>72</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 64.

<sup>73</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 78.

<sup>74</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 78.

<sup>75</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 16.

worship, tombs, and places to house and pay teachers and students.<sup>76</sup> Most importantly, these institutions were responsible for transmitting and nurturing Islam throughout the community and seeing to the spiritual welfare of the teachers and students.<sup>77</sup> The system of education itself was so fluid that one can expect the functions of its institutions to be so also.

As well, many informal educational institutions existed. Many of these were also endowed, but some were not. Some teachers would host private teaching circles in which the students would pay individually for instruction.<sup>78</sup> Others would volunteer to teach because they enjoyed it, because they “sought a reward from God,” or because they did not want to be affiliated with an institution.<sup>79</sup> Some teachers may have done so because there were no available positions at a given institution. When teachers grew older, some would abandon a paying post for a more informal one.<sup>80</sup> In addition, visiting scholars to a town or city would often give lectures to the inhabitants.<sup>81</sup>

### Teaching Appointments

By the Middle Ages, academic appointments (singular, *manṣab*) at educational institutions were sold by the sultan or ruling authority to scholars.<sup>82</sup> However, it is hard to discern over long periods and in various areas who was in control of appointments to particular posts. Certainly, though, the person who endowed an institution had a say in who was appointed there; biographical dictionaries support this assertion by listing the founder as the person who

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<sup>76</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 62.

<sup>77</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 63.

<sup>78</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 86.

<sup>79</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 87.

<sup>80</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 89.

<sup>81</sup> S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, vol. 2: *The Community* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), 194.

<sup>82</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 97.



appointed a teacher to a position.<sup>83</sup> Mamlūk amīrs often put people with whom they had close personal ties in positions of prominence.<sup>84</sup> Sultans, on the other hand, appointed professors only at the most prestigious schools, though they would intervene if there was a conflict between two important officials as to a placement at a school.<sup>85</sup> When there was a change in the dominant political faction, the ruler or head religious official would often put new people who were loyal to him in key religious and educational positions. For example, Michael Chamberlain recounts Baybars al-Jāshnikīr's (r. 1308-1309) shaykh, al-Manbijī, dismissing a scholar associated with his enemy, the reactionary firebrand Ibn Taymiyya, from a manṣab; yet when Baybars died in 1277, many of al-Manbijī's supporters lost their positions.<sup>86</sup> As well, in order to gain positions, people would sometimes enlist the aid of important officials, accuse a person already holding a coveted position of immoral conduct, or pay bribes.<sup>87</sup>

Members of the 'ulamā' would try to obtain teaching positions for their friends, members of their families, and their students, as well. Sometimes they would do this by retiring and passing on their positions to their chosen successors.<sup>88</sup> A member of the 'ulamā' could also establish a school and make it a requirement of the endowment that his descendents have teaching posts there.<sup>89</sup> The practice of a father transferring his position to his son became exceedingly commonplace in the Middle Ages, even expected. It allowed the scholarly elite to pass on their wealth and power to the next generation, showing that the educational system was not completely open and meritocratic.

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<sup>83</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 99.

<sup>84</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 100.

<sup>85</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 101.

<sup>86</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 96.

<sup>87</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 97.

<sup>88</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 109.

<sup>89</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 121.

With the high demand for these positions, it comes as something of a surprise that a single scholar could hold multiple academic appointments. As with the buying of academic positions, this practice was not accepted by everyone. Some severely criticized it, and in Damascus during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, teachers were forbidden to have two positions.<sup>90</sup> However, this became a widely accepted practice, even when it meant that the teacher or official could not fulfill all of the obligations of the two positions. Professors who held multiple positions would often hire substitutes to teach in their places.<sup>91</sup> These individuals were also hired if the teacher had to go away for a time or if he or she was becoming too old to teach. As well, if a son inherited his father's position but was too young to teach, a substitute would be appointed until he reached the appropriate age.<sup>92</sup> Some teachers did not hold any appointments at all, and it was considered honorable for one to refuse an appointment, especially one attached to the government.<sup>93</sup>

### **The Transmission of Knowledge**

The way in which knowledge was transmitted had a direct impact on the relationships that were established between teachers and students. It was assumed when a student began studying with a shaykh that he or she already had a basic understanding of Arabic (even if Arabic were not his first language) and the Qur'ān. Some would learn these core subjects at home, while others would go to a type of elementary or primary school called a *kuttāb*, whose main function was to help children memorize the Qur'ān.<sup>94</sup> One of the most important factors in

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<sup>90</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 114.

<sup>91</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 116.

<sup>92</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 118.

<sup>93</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 78.

<sup>94</sup> Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, vol. 2, 176.

knowledge transmission among the ‘ulamā’ was the recitation of a text with an instructor. Students had access to the written word: collections of ḥadīth, textbooks, treatises, commentaries, and abridgements.<sup>95</sup> However, unlike the situation in post-Renaissance western Europe, where individual creativity came to be prized, students would listen to a teacher recite a text that he had written or learned, and then they would copy it down to recite back to the teacher.<sup>96</sup> This is not to say that books were not valuable; students were advised to purchase them or to copy them from the recitations of their teacher.<sup>97</sup> Students were to be avid readers and memorizers of texts, but true learning and understanding could come only from a personal relationship with a teacher who could correct and offer instruction to the student. Berkey comments that this may have served to emphasize the teacher’s authority, as the student had to constantly check his work and his understanding of the material with him or her.<sup>98</sup>

Memorization and repetition were especially crucial to a student’s learning. Muslim societies had a long history of oral transmission; therefore even with the advent of paper and books, people still valued the oral component of education. The 13<sup>th</sup>-century biographer Ibn Khallikān mentions a scholar named Abu l’Maḥāsīn al-Ruyānī who boasted that if all of al-Shāfi‘ī’s works were burned, he could recite them from memory.<sup>99</sup> He also recounts a story of al-Malik al-Mu‘aẓẓam b. al-‘Ādil, son of an Ayyūbid prince, who paid money to all those who could memorize the grammar of the great Mu‘tazilite commentator al-Zamakhsharī (ca. 1074-

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<sup>95</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 24.

<sup>96</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 24.

<sup>97</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 25.

<sup>98</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 28.

<sup>99</sup> Shams al-Dīn Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Khallikān, *Ibn Khallikān’s Biographical Dictionary*, trans. M. G. de Slane, vol. 2 (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2010; originally published Paris: Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1842-43), 146, Google Books, <http://books.google.com/books?id=hPNlJ6C-V28C&lpg=PP1&dq=ibn%20khallikan&pg=PP1#v=snippet&q=ar-ruyani&f=false>.

1144).<sup>100</sup> On a daily basis, students would go over lessons they had learned previously with their instructors, reducing the number of repetitions until they had the text memorized.<sup>101</sup> The great 14<sup>th</sup>-century North African polymath Ibn Khaldūn explains that students need a threefold repetition that gradually introduces them to the topic so that they will fully understand it.<sup>102</sup> Students would also study with one another and read books giving tips for more effective memorization.

According to the biographical dictionaries that we possess, students were identified with the teachers with whom they studied, as opposed to the madrasas or similar institutions they attended. The only time a student from Damascus was associated with a school was when he or she studied at the Nizāmiyya madrasa in Baghdad, because it was a school of great prestige that had attracted many prominent scholars over the years, including the legendary theologian al-Ghazālī (1058-1111).<sup>103</sup> Otherwise, schools are mentioned only to specify the type of lodging and stipend the student received.<sup>104</sup> Students did not seem to become attached to the schools they attended. Additionally, teachers were identified with the subjects they taught and with their students, but not with the institutions at which they taught. Students were known to participate in study circles with professors even when their institutions did not provide stipends for the professors or support for the students.<sup>105</sup> Berkey comments that the personal connection a teacher had with a student was a central factor in Islamic education.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Ibn Khallikān, *Ibn Khallikān's Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 1, 428.

<sup>101</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 29-30.

<sup>102</sup> Walī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, ed. N. J. Dawood (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), 416.

<sup>103</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 75.

<sup>104</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 76.

<sup>105</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 18.

<sup>106</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 21.

Students chose what to study and with whom to study. Al-Zarnūjī advises in his treatise on education, “When undertaking the study of knowledge, it is necessary to choose among all the branches of learning the one most beneficial to oneself.”<sup>107</sup> Further, regarding the teacher, he comments, “It is important to select the most learned, the most pious and the most advanced in years.”<sup>108</sup> Of course, basing the selection on these criteria would not guarantee that the teacher would be the most scholarly. Many educational treatises provide advice on picking the proper teacher, showing the importance of this choice for the student’s future studies. The reputation of a specific teacher had a direct impact on his or her students, and in fact, students were often judged by the quality of their teachers.

Once a student had mastered the material, he or she was given an *ijāza*, a certificate testifying that the student had studied and understood the text the teacher gave him or her, could teach a certain subject, or could accurately recite a certain ḥadīth.<sup>109</sup> The *ijāza* included the chain of transmitters of the particular text that was supposed to link the author to the teacher who was reciting it – and therefore to the student. Thus, the *ijāza* was not a degree, but rather a license that linked the student to the teacher and the teacher’s teachers through the body of knowledge it represented.<sup>110</sup> One did not have to study at a madrasa in order to obtain an *ijāza*; as Chamberlain states, “The *ijāza* was rather a sign of authority that was transmitted within temporary social networks bound together through loyalties of love and service.”<sup>111</sup>

Unfortunately, as in the case of ḥadīths, often the chain of transmission of an *ijāza* contained incorrect or fictitious information. Even more alarming was the practice of issuing

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<sup>107</sup> Burhān al-Dīn al-Zarnūjī, *Ta’līm al-Muta’allim-Ṭarīq at-Ta’allum: Instruction of the Student, the Method of Learning*, trans. G. E. von Grunebaum and Theodora M. Abel (New York: King’s Crown Press, 1947), 28.

<sup>108</sup> Al-Zarnūjī, *Ta’līm al-Muta’allim-Ṭarīq at-Ta’allum*, 28.

<sup>109</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 31.

<sup>110</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 31.

<sup>111</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 89.

ijāzas frivolously. Thus there were students who had ijāzas from teachers they had barely met or not met at all. Parents would occasionally bring a very young child to hear a teacher recite a text; the child, who no doubt did not understand what he had heard, would then receive an ijāza.<sup>112</sup> The parents did this because, since the child was young and listening to a text from an older shaykh, there would be fewer names in the chain of transmission, making the ijāza more impressive. The child would grow up to possibly be the only surviving transmitter from an older, venerable shaykh. In addition, those concerned probably hoped that there would be fewer errors in the text with fewer links in the chain.<sup>113</sup> Though this system was often abused, the ijāza had a place in connecting students to their teachers through a specific body of knowledge.

The relationship between students and teachers was not one of friendship. It was a relationship of mutual benefit in which the teacher gave benefit and the student received it.<sup>114</sup> In biographical dictionaries, often students are described as “enjoying the benefit” of a particular shaykh.<sup>115</sup> The relationship between the two was called *ṣuḥba*. Although this means “companionship” in Arabic, a better translation that encompasses the meaning of the word would be “discipleship.”<sup>116</sup> It is similar to the Sufi master-disciple relationship, which will be discussed later in this paper. Students who were dedicated to intense study with a teacher over many years engaged in *ṣuḥba*, though students could and did travel to other teachers. The relationship was not a lifelong one, as students were encouraged to actively seek learning throughout their lives.

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<sup>112</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 32.

<sup>113</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 33.

<sup>114</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 112.

<sup>115</sup> Ibn Khallikān, *Ibn Khallikān's Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 1, 381.

<sup>116</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 34,

Ibn Khaldūn, in his *Muqaddimah*, encourages students to travel in search of knowledge and cultivate personal connections with several teachers.<sup>117</sup>

The teacher was the authority figure in the relationship, and the student was not allowed to take that lightly. Analogies such as the relationship of a master to a slave and a father to a child were commonly applied to intellectual relationships.<sup>118</sup> According to al-Zarnūjī, a professor who teaches even one letter of the alphabet to a student becomes his “father in religion.”<sup>119</sup> An element of love existed in the relationship between student and shaykh, but it was in the sense of esteem and acknowledgment of the bond between them. This love could be expressed by gifts from the student to the shaykh, declarations of loyalty, or visiting the shaykh often.

In study circles, students were expected to sit near the teacher, but never close enough to touch him; not even the most advanced students were allowed this honor.<sup>120</sup> Students were to cut off family ties when they sought learning because the shaykh was to take over the role of father.<sup>121</sup> They were also discouraged from marrying or starting families of their own during their courses of study. Even socializing outside of the academic setting was discouraged. Berkey states, with respect to the duties of a student to his teacher, “His responsibilities extended to physically shielding his shaykh from pressing crowds of people, approaching him only with clean clothing...caring for his teacher’s children and descendents; and, as a virtual member of his extended family, visiting the dead shaykh’s tomb.”<sup>122</sup> Some students had so much reverence

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<sup>117</sup> Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, 426.

<sup>118</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 35-36.

<sup>119</sup> Al-Zarnūjī, *Ta’līm al-Muta’allim-Ṭarīq at-Ta’allum*, 32.

<sup>120</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 37.

<sup>121</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 110.

<sup>122</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 36.

for their shaykhs that they wore their discarded clothes or desired to be buried with them.<sup>123</sup>

Students were supposed to praise and flatter their teachers to show their respect as well.<sup>124</sup>

Teachers were responsible not only for their students' learning but also for their moral behavior. They were to direct and reprove students in all aspects of their lives. Teachers were also supposed to make themselves available for questions, but often their advanced students were the ones who helped younger students with the material.<sup>125</sup> A sort of "teaching assistant" position developed for those who repeated the lessons that the teachers gave, helped students, and listened to them recite.<sup>126</sup> However, the assistant would not be included in the chain of transmission between the teacher and the student. They were there to aid the teacher in his lessons only. Many students would serve as assistants before becoming legitimate scholars.

Shaykhs expressed love and loyalty toward each other as well, and cultivated intellectual relationships. Shaykhs had intimate circles called *khūṣūṣiyya* which often included other shaykhs.<sup>127</sup> Sometimes the bond between two scholars was so strong that one would relocate to be closer to the other.<sup>128</sup> The focal point of the bond was knowledge, and scholars often described their relationship with knowledge itself as one of love.<sup>129</sup> Teachers also served one another as a part of their relationship. This could mean simply being around a shaykh who was widely esteemed and visiting him often.<sup>130</sup> In fact, the number of visits a scholar received from students and from other teachers became a mark of his prestige in the community.

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<sup>123</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 109.

<sup>124</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 38.

<sup>125</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 39.

<sup>126</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 40.

<sup>127</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 115.

<sup>128</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 115.

<sup>129</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 116.

<sup>130</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 119.



Students cultivated relationships with each other as well. They were encouraged to study together after class and quiz each other on the material learned.<sup>131</sup> They read aloud together as well as in private. It was thought that this allowed students to focus more closely on the material.<sup>132</sup> Al-Zarnūjī advises students to choose diligent, religious friends of good character and to avoid those who are negligent and corrupt, because the students would be judged based on their friends and their friends could exert negative influences on them in their studies.<sup>133</sup> These friendships allowed students to begin making connections early to aid them in their future careers.

## **Conclusion**

The relationships between students and shaykhs, among shaykhs, and among students were multifaceted. Though the madrasa was an important institution, education and relationships were often fostered outside of that institution. These relationships involved giving and receiving benefit from one another through ties of loyalty and respect that came from a shared love of knowledge. The importance of oral transmission allowed students to bond with their teachers closely and emphasized the authority the shaykh had over the student and the respect he deserved.

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<sup>131</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 27.

<sup>132</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 27.

<sup>133</sup> Al-Zarnūjī. *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim-Ṭarīq at-Ta'allum*, 30-31.

### Chapter 3: Education among the Elite

As members of non-Arab ethnic groups, the Mamlūks were outsiders in many ways, including language and culture. Many Arabophone observers were prejudiced against the Mamlūks, doubting their abilities to reach high levels of learning and religious piety. However, though Arab writers have a tendency to disregard Mamlūk intellectual achievements, many made significant contributions to the intellectual lives of the cities in which they lived, and some created personal connections with members of the ‘ulamā’ themselves. According to Barbara Flemming, “If some day the Sultans’ and grand amīrs’ collections and activities can be viewed as a whole, it will be seen that their halls, and also those of other amīrs of sufficient rank and income, were places where literature in the widest sense was appreciated.”<sup>134</sup> The elite – the Mamlūks, their descendents, and other local notables – interacted with one another through waqf, legitimizing each other’s roles in society, and using education to gain social influence.

#### Mamlūk Education

Mamlūk education began with conversion to Islam and learning basic Muslim religious practices and principles. Eunuchs were vital in this educational system as they helped train and supervise the Mamlūk boys.<sup>135</sup> Young Mamlūks learned Arabic, the Qur’ān, Islamic law, religious rituals, and some jurisprudence so that they could not only become good Muslims but

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<sup>134</sup> Barbara Flemming, “Literary Activities in Mamlūk Halls and Barracks,” in *Studies in Memory of Gaston Wiet*, ed. Myriam Rosen-Ayalon (Jerusalem: Institute of Asian and African Studies, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1977), 249.

<sup>135</sup> David Ayalon, *Eunuchs, Caliphs, and Sultans: A Study in Power Relationships* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, the Hebrew University, 1999), 33.

also understand the new culture in which they now lived.<sup>136</sup> Thus, though they were not at the rank of the high ‘ulamā’, they most likely knew considerably more about Islam than the subject classes. Military manuals and other books thought to be used in Mamlūk instruction are in Arabic or Kipchak Turkish, also known as Chagatai, though the latter was surely the initial language of instruction.<sup>137</sup> This would have meant, of course, that the later Circassian recruits would have to learn both Kipchak Turkish and Arabic when they began their training. After the students became more adept at Arabic, instruction was most likely carried out in that language. In studying manuscripts copied by Mamlūks, Flemming suggests that perhaps Mamlūk students were required to copy manuscripts as a part of their education -- manuscripts that would later grace the sultan’s personal library.<sup>138</sup> Overall, their education was primarily focused on giving them a solid military background along with an understanding of the culture of the people they were to oversee.

Some Mamlūks went beyond this foundation to more substantial intellectual heights, but understanding how many did so and how learned members of the ruling class became is difficult. Those who attempted to move beyond their military education often found that they were unable to delve into deeper levels of understanding.<sup>139</sup> Of course, the records may exaggerate the Mamlūk inability to sufficiently master Islamic sciences, perhaps in an attempt to emphasize the ‘ulamā’s superiority or perhaps because of cultural prejudice.<sup>140</sup> As the records of Mamlūk intellectual accomplishments were written primarily by the ‘ulamā’, it is difficult to tell what exactly Mamlūk literary contributions may have been. If a Mamlūk was adept at Arabic or the

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<sup>136</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 147.

<sup>137</sup> Flemming, “Literary Activities in Mamlūk Halls and Barracks,” 259.

<sup>138</sup> Flemming, “Literary Activities in Mamlūk Halls and Barracks,” 259.

<sup>139</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo in Medieval Cairo*, 151.

<sup>140</sup> Nasser Rabat, “Representing the Mamlūks in Mamlūk Historical Writing,” in *The Historiography of Islamic Egypt (c. 950-1800)*, ed. Hugh Kennedy (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 68.

Islamic sciences, the historian or writer would often take note. For example, Ibn Taghrī Birdī describes the Sultan al-Malik al-Zāhir Jakmak (r. 1438- 1453) as “fluent in Turkish and Arabic, very good in comparison with men of his race. He occupied himself with science, had a ready memory for good [legal] questions, and would engage in disputation with scholars and jurists.”<sup>141</sup> As will be discussed later, children of the Mamlūks, the *awlād al-nās*, could and often did become members of the ‘ulamā’.

In the Mamlūk courts, a Turkish literary tradition arose in which people could read stories about the Prophet Muḥammad as well as other stories based on the Qur’ān, poetry, and other intellectual writings.<sup>142</sup> However, Barbara Flemming argues that Mamlūks read mostly Arabic documents, books, and other materials while still speaking Turkish.<sup>143</sup> Written Turkish was used primarily for entertainment and instruction of the Mamlūks.<sup>144</sup> Some members of the elite composed poetry in Turkish, Arabic, or both.

Mamlūks were especially interested in ḥadīth. They often were seen at public ḥadīth recitations, and some even participated in its transmission.<sup>145</sup> In their religious endowments, which will be more fully discussed later, they often stipulated that ḥadīth be recited publicly during Ramaḍān, and some even held ḥadīth recitation sessions in their homes.<sup>146</sup> In the lengthy lists of the transmitters of particular ḥadīth, Mamlūks are often mentioned. They clearly felt that this intellectual activity was important, and though they were “outsiders” in terms of language and culture, they were able to participate in intellectual society.

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<sup>141</sup> Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *History of Egypt, Part III*, vol. 19 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), 163.

<sup>142</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 152.

<sup>143</sup> Flemming, “Literary Activities in Mamlūk Halls and Barracks,” 251.

<sup>144</sup> Flemming, “Literary Activities in Mamlūk Halls and Barracks,” 251.

<sup>145</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 155.

<sup>146</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 156.

Some Mamlūks developed personal relationships with prominent Sufi shaykhs or members of the ‘ulamā’.<sup>147</sup> They also often married into the scholarly class. By doing so, Mamlūks could become more learned by taking lessons with their fathers-in-law or the relatives of their fathers-in-law. Mamlūk connections with the ‘ulamā’ were not as strong as those of their sons, but they existed and were an important way in which they integrated themselves into the larger intellectual society.

### **The ‘Ulamā’**

The ‘ulamā’ relied upon Mamlūk sultans and amīrs for financial support, protection, and selection for some state-appointed positions. Though the ‘ulamā’ included people of a variety of social levels, few Mamlūks were admitted to their ranks; Mamlūk education consisted primarily of military arts. However, the ‘ulamā’ depended on the Mamlūk elite because they were the ones who controlled most of the land that generated wealth.<sup>148</sup> As noted in the description of waqf above, charitable endowments allowed for the support and maintenance of institutions such as madrasas. Thus, the ‘ulamā’ were “limited by institutions which tied them to the wills of previous generations or the rights of future ones.”<sup>149</sup> The ‘ulamā’ required the financial support that only the ruling class could give them to maintain students, teachers, and educational institutions. In Damascus, however, there was less patronage than there was in Egypt, perhaps because the elite Mamlūks who were likely to possess the funds to patronize architecture were in

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<sup>147</sup> Erik Ohlander, “‘He was Crude of Speech’: Turks and Arabs in the Hagiographical Imagination of Early Ottoman Egypt,” in *The Arab Lands in the Ottoman Era: Essays in Honor of Caesar Farah*, ed. Jane Hathaway (Minneapolis: Center for Early Modern History, University of Minnesota, 2010), 111-135, at 116.

<sup>148</sup> Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, 130.

<sup>149</sup> Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, 131.

Damascus on a temporary basis, while positions in Cairo were fixed.<sup>150</sup> There is evidence, though, that Mamlūk Sultans in Cairo would establish waqfs in Damascus, such as one established by Baybars (1223-1277) for a Sufi *zāwiya* (another term for a *khānqāh*).<sup>151</sup> Some even built their tombs in Damascus, and at least one, that built by Sultan Khushqadam (d. 1467), was incorporated into a madrasa complex.<sup>152</sup> Baybars himself was buried in Damascus.

The ‘ulamā’ also enjoyed Mamlūk protection of the community, but they were not particularly loyal to the regime itself.<sup>153</sup> Any regime that could defend Muslim society from invaders would suffice. The Syrian historian al-Yūnīnī records in his *Dhayl mir’āt al-zamān* that a coalition of ‘ulamā’ went before the Mongol leader Ghāzān in 1300, while the Mongols were harassing the Syrian borders, to transfer their loyalty to him if he did not loot the city.<sup>154</sup> Given that Ghāzān had converted to Sunni Islam prior to this event, they would have been pledging allegiance to a Muslim leader, not an unbeliever. Again, when Tīmūr invaded Syria in 1400, some members of the ‘ulamā’ wanted to fight while others were prepared to surrender immediately to avoid bloodshed (though Tīmūr’s army raided and destroyed Damascus anyway).<sup>155</sup> Tīmūr, like Ghāzān, was a Sunni Muslim. At times, though, the ‘ulamā’ would rally to defend the community and Islam by encouraging the people to fight for the faith, including teachers and students.

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<sup>150</sup> R. Stephen Humphreys, “Politics and Architectural Patronage in Ayyūbid Damascus,” in *The Islamic World: From Classical to Modern Times*, eds. C. E. Bosworth, Charles Issawi, Roger Savory, and A. L. Udovitch (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1989), 160-161.

<sup>151</sup> Michael Winter, “Mamlūks and their Households in Late Mamlūk Damascus: A *Waqf* Study,” in *The Mamlūks in Egyptian and Syrian Politics and Society*, eds. Michael Winter and Amalia Levanoni. (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 301.

<sup>152</sup> Winter, “Mamlūks and their Households in Late Mamlūk Damascus,” 302.

<sup>153</sup> Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, 131.

<sup>154</sup> Quṭb al-Dīn Abu ’l-Faṭḥ Mūsā b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Yūnīnī, *Dhayl mir’āt al-zamān*, trans. Li Guo, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 138-139.

<sup>155</sup> Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, 133.

Many members of the ‘ulamā’ also relied on the Mamlūk government for their appointments to certain positions. As Ira Lapidus describes, “The most prominent ‘ulamā’ officers, such as the chief qadis, army judges, the chief legal consultants, the head of the public treasury, and the market inspector were all state appointed.”<sup>156</sup> Other positions that were not necessarily state appointed required official confirmation in order to legitimize them, though the ‘ulamā’ often recommended certain individuals to fill these positions. They could also recommend that certain individuals not be appointed to certain positions, as in the case in 1419 when scholars urged Sultan al-Mu’ayyad Shaykh (r. 1412-1421) not to appoint Christians to positions in his government owing to some recent unruly behavior on the part of the Christians.<sup>157</sup> Sometimes a member of the ‘ulamā’ would work directly for the state as the Sultan’s secretary or treasurer, as a worker in a military bureau, as a vizier, or as a scribe.<sup>158</sup>

The Mamlūk elite depended on the ‘ulamā’ and educational institutions to connect them to local society and legitimize the taxes they imposed. Founding a madrasa could go a long way in connecting the Mamlūks to the local populace. The madrasa was often named after the founder, therefore giving him or her political influence as people would associate the person with supporting education.<sup>159</sup> As Jonathan Berkey points out, “The Mamlūks were able to link their names with the most valued asset of the society over which they ruled.”<sup>160</sup> The association between madrasas and tombs was great, and as a result, a person who founded a school would often be buried on the grounds, along with his or her family members. The people who visited these tombs housed inside of waqf-endowed madrasas remembered and felt the presence of those

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<sup>156</sup> Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, 135.

<sup>157</sup> Ibn Taghrī Birdī, *History of Egypt*, vol. 17, 67.

<sup>158</sup> Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, 137-138.

<sup>159</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 133.

<sup>160</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 133-134.

buried there.<sup>161</sup> Berkey describes how Sultan al-Zāhir Barqūq (d. 1399) requested that his tomb lie next to his madrasa along the Bayn al-Qasrayn thoroughfare “for the benefit of those who frequent it, Qur’ān readers, [his] descendents, and his relatives.”<sup>162</sup> This practice connected the founders to the generations of society that came after them.

When Mamlūks raised taxes on the populace, primarily due to warfare, the ‘ulamā’ confirmed that these taxes were legal, allowing the Mamlūks to raise the needed funds without significant disruption.<sup>163</sup> At times, members of the ‘ulamā’ helped collect taxes as well. It was in the interest of the scholarly elite to keep funds flowing into Mamlūk hands as they often received benefits in return, in the form of supervisory positions attached to waqfs or other high offices. As well, the Mamlūks required this economic legitimacy to assure the public that they were taxing them fairly and in accordance with Islamic law.

### **The *Awlād al-Nās***

Although the Mamlūks are generally regarded as a non-hereditary aristocracy, the typical Mamlūk sultan would attempt to have his son succeed him on the throne. A safer way to ensure the succession of wealth and prestige through one’s lineage was through waqf. One of the reasons, alongside gaining social capital, for establishing waqf was to pass on one’s wealth down through the generations. Though this was not a completely reliable method, it was one of the most secure. In the deeds for the establishment of a religious or charitable institution, often the founder and his descendents were given payments from the income generated by the waqf.<sup>164</sup> As well, descendents would also be given the right to control the waqf after the founder’s death, as

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<sup>161</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 145.

<sup>162</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 145.

<sup>163</sup> Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, 135.

<sup>164</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 135.



long as the person was appointed according to the stipulations the founder had laid out in the endowment deed.<sup>165</sup> In Damascus, there is direct evidence that some children of Mamlūks, known in Arabic as *awlād al-nās*, also endowed waqf. Sayf al-Dīn Manjak (d. 1374) was a Mamlūk governor in Syria whose grandson, Nāṣir al-Dīn Manjak, had two mosques built outside of Damascus.<sup>166</sup> Thus, the children of the powerful Mamlūk aristocracy had a connection to education through their administration or endowment of madrasas and similar institutions.

The *awlād al-nās* also had the advantage of being brought up in Mamlūk households and understanding the intricacies of Mamlūk affairs while being raised in the culture to which their fathers had been unable to assimilate completely. They spoke Arabic fluently, another distinct benefit. They were able to connect the Mamlūk world with that of the native population, particularly the intellectual world. The *awlād al-nās* produced several great historians, including Ibn Taghrī Birdī (d. 1470), al-Ṣafadī (late 13<sup>th</sup> to early 14<sup>th</sup> century), Ibn al-Dawādārī (early 14<sup>th</sup> century), and Ibn Iyās (1448-ca. 1524).<sup>167</sup> Others were scholars of the Islamic sciences or affiliated with Sufi brotherhoods. Many engaged in ḥadīth transmission or composed poetry.<sup>168</sup> However, because the *awlād al-nās* existed in the space between their Mamlūk fathers and the society in which they were raised, they often experienced conflict between becoming part of the administrative bureaucracy and becoming fully integrated members of intellectual society.<sup>169</sup> The *awlād al-nās* described by biographers are often those who chose the latter path and followed intellectual pursuits. Ulrich Haarmann comments that in Egypt, they were more likely to identify with their Turkish heritage and be closer to the political sphere than in Syria, where

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<sup>165</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 136.

<sup>166</sup> Winter, "Mamlūks and their Households in Late Mamlūk Damascus," 307.

<sup>167</sup> Ulrich Haarmann, "Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage: Mamlūks and their Sons in the Intellectual Life of Fourteenth-Century Egypt and Syria," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 23 (1988), 106.

<sup>168</sup> Haarmann, "Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage," 108.

<sup>169</sup> Haarmann, "Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage," 110.

there was no central imperial court and where the power of the local ‘ulamā’ often drew in the sons of Mamlūk amīrs.<sup>170</sup>

### **The A‘yān**

The Mamlūks and their descendents were not the only groups who possessed power. The “local notables,” or *a‘yān*, were also an influential and wealthy group that participated in the intellectual world with particular vigor. However, there is some debate as to exactly whom this term refers to and how much power these individuals had. Michael Chamberlain describes their households not as “agencies that held specific and differentiated functions” but rather “households...[that] had a similar structure and exercised power through similar practices.”<sup>171</sup> According to this definition, these were civilian people on whom the Mamlūk aristocracy depended for entrance into the society over which they ruled.

At the same time, the Mamlūk aristocracy would reward a‘yān in a variety of ways which included the establishment of waqf on their behalf.<sup>172</sup> This allowed the local elite to preserve their wealth and status, as the Mamlūks and awlād al-nās did. It also gave the a‘yān prominent locations for their tombs, since putting tombs on the grounds of madrasas or like institutions was common practice, especially in Syria.<sup>173</sup> As in the case of the Mamlūks and awlād al-nās, waqf gave the a‘yān entrée into intellectual life since many waqf establishments were madrasas. The a‘yān could participate in the ceremonies and attend the lectures held at the madrasa or mosque in question and connect with others socially.

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<sup>170</sup> Haarmann, “Arabic in Speech, Turkish in Lineage,” 110.

<sup>171</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 40.

<sup>172</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 51.

<sup>173</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 56.

The local elite used knowledge as a sort of social capital. By becoming learned, they could become a part of the revered ‘ulamā’ and could attain positions at madrasas or similar institutions to receive the income for teachers or students stipulated in the waqf.<sup>174</sup> As well, knowledge was something that others respected, and they could gain prestige among the common people and among the ruling elite by becoming influential members of the intellectual world.

## **Conclusion**

Mamlūks, with their basic Islamic education, and the ‘ulamā’ depended on one another for the benefits they could give each other. The Mamlūks controlled a large portion of the society’s wealth, which meant that they were responsible for the establishment of many, if not most, educational institutions and teaching/student positions upon which the scholars relied. As well, they provided protection from outsiders with their strong military. The ‘ulamā’, on the other hand, legitimized Mamlūk rule, allowed the Mamlūks to collect taxes without fear of serious revolt, and gave them an entrée into local society through connections to knowledge. The descendants of the Mamlūks acted as a bridge between the Turkish and Circassian ruling class and the Arabophone populace by administering or establishing waqf and becoming members of the scholarly elite. Finally, the local elite used knowledge and educational institutions as a form of economic and social capital, by protecting their wealth through waqf and gaining knowledge to propel themselves higher in society. These groups used knowledge transmission and educational institutions to interact with one another and cement their roles in society.

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<sup>174</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 64.

## Chapter 4: Sufi Education

Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, was an influential part of medieval culture in much of the Islamic world. Although it was not institutionalized until several centuries after Muḥammad's death, Sufis trace their mystical lineage back to the Prophet. They revere the Qur'ān just as any pious Muslim does, yet they believe there is a deeper interpretation (*ta'wīl*) to its message.<sup>175</sup> In order to arrive at this meaning, they engage in *dhikr*, which leads them to a closer relationship with God. Dhikr was a way to remind oneself of God, through prayer, reflection, meditation, recitation of a certain word or phrase, or other means. The orders that developed were known as *tarīqas*, as were the paths that each order taught. The 'ulamā' sometimes condemned Sufis because they were outside of the traditional educational system, had teachings some perceived as dangerous, and often were their competitors for patronage from rulers.<sup>176</sup> However, other members of the 'ulamā' were Sufis themselves or identified with some Sufi practices. In order to identify Sufi educational practices and how they interacted with traditional intellectual relationships, one must first discuss the growth of Sufism before and during the Mamlūk Sultanate and the orders that were active in Syria.

### The Development of Sufism

Sufism in its early stages was more of an individual pursuit than an organized movement, existing alongside other Islamic institutions. J.S. Trimingham, as explained by Erik Ohlander, proposed a theory that, although debated, shows the development of Sufism throughout the

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<sup>175</sup> Frederick Mathewson Denny, *An Introduction to Islam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc., 2006), 213.

<sup>176</sup> Roy Mottahedeh, *The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009; originally published New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), 148.

Middle Ages. The “*khānqāh*” stage occurred in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, and there was little communal regulation. The master and disciples often lived a wandering lifestyle, traveling from *khānqāh* to *khānqāh*. Though Trimingham uses this term to refer to the Sufi institutions of the time, it may not be the most accurate; the differences between these institutions will be discussed later in the paper. The 12<sup>th</sup> through the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries represented the “*ṭarīqa*” stage, in which Sufism became more systematized and attempted to conform to mainstream Islam and Islamic law. The 15<sup>th</sup> century began the “*tā’ifā*” stage, which led to many new sub-orders and growth under the Ottoman Empire.<sup>177</sup> Sufism during this period spread widely and reached a variety of people. One theory adduced to explain this expansion includes Sufism’s tolerance of diversity and acceptance of local differences. As well, Sufism was able to “[replace the] older forms of unity and order (such as the old caliphal bureaucracy) with a ‘comprehensive spiritual hierarchy of *pīrs* [Sufi masters].’”<sup>178</sup> Once Sufis became more closely connected with the ‘ulamā’, they were able to reach an even wider audience through the madrasas since both teachers and students were housed there, and Sufis also had access to the general populace that these institutions served.<sup>179</sup> Many people adopted various forms of Sufi piety in their daily lives, including visiting shaykhs, visiting tombs, and celebrating the birthdays of saints.<sup>180</sup> Dhikr, as well, became a popular activity in which ordinary people could participate. Miracles and other supernatural deeds were often attributed to shaykhs, and some people thought they could receive some sort of benefit or blessing by praying near a shaykh’s tomb.

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<sup>177</sup> Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, 3.

<sup>178</sup> Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, 5.

<sup>179</sup> Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, 4-5.

<sup>180</sup> Daphna Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers, Leaders in Piety: Sufis and the Dissemination of Islam in Medieval Palestine* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 131.

As orders fell more in line with conventional Islam, Sufis often became a part of the ‘ulamā’. Some members of the religious elite still opposed them, yet overall the Sufis were able to take an active, visible role in daily religious life. However, not all Sufis leaned toward conventional religious practices; some were extremely puritanical. For example, in 1357, a group of Sufis in Damascus attacked hashish and wine parlors, but they were beaten back by the people benefitting from these institutions.<sup>181</sup> The tradition of individual, wandering antinomian Sufis also continued. A discussion of some of the orders and notable figures can give a clearer picture of Sufi life in Syria.

### **Sufi Orders in Syria**

The Badawiyya order was largely Egyptian, but it was present in Syria as well. Ahmad al-Badawī (d. 1276), a Moroccan Sufi who settled in the Nile Delta town of Tanta early in his career, was the founder of this order. His teaching was so influential that he became the “patron saint” of Egypt, and many miracles have been ascribed to him. He is known for his eccentric practices, such as staring at the sun, being silent or screaming for long periods, and fasting for days.<sup>182</sup> The Badawiyya order became popular among the Mamlūk ruling elite (many Mamlūks venerated al-Badawī), and it was a more decentralized order than some others.<sup>183</sup> Therefore, the practices and beliefs varied, though overall the order encouraged its followers to earn their own livings, taught women about religion, and venerated saints.<sup>184</sup> One major part of the order’s

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<sup>181</sup> Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, 106.

<sup>182</sup> K. Vollers, “Aḥmad al-Badawī.” *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2006 [database online], available from [http://www.brillonline.nl.proxy.lib.ohiostate.edu/subscriber/entry?entry=islam\\_SIM-0402](http://www.brillonline.nl.proxy.lib.ohiostate.edu/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-0402), internet, accessed 30 April 2011.

<sup>183</sup> Michael Winter, *Egyptian Society under Ottoman Rule, 1517-1798* (London: Routledge, 1992), 130.

<sup>184</sup> Winter, *Egyptian Society under Ottoman Rule*, 130.

activities was the annual pilgrimage to al-Badawi's tomb in Tanta to commemorate his birthday. The order was also influential in rural areas of Egypt outside Tanta, and in Syria.

The Bisṭāmiyya order was founded in eastern Iran, but a branch developed in Greater Syria. Many of the most prominent shaykhs of the order came to be located in Jerusalem.<sup>185</sup> Shaykhs from all over Greater Syria would congregate at the Ṣalāhiyya Mosque, where the order had a headquarters, and teach both Sufi concepts and Islamic law.<sup>186</sup>

The Burhāniyya order began in Egypt but spread to Syria.<sup>187</sup> The founder, Burhān al-Dīn al-Dasūqī (c. 1235-1278), was born in Egypt and lived there throughout his life. He taught the importance of inner purity, love, trust, and self-mortification.<sup>188</sup>

The Khawātiriyya order, on the other hand, began in Syria. It was founded by Shaykh Muḥammad ibn 'Arrāq (d. 1556), son of a Circassian amīr from Damascus and disciple of 'Alī ibn Maymūn, a Sufi from the Maghrib.<sup>189</sup> The name refers to the adherents' practice of revealing their thoughts (*khawātir*) to their sheikh, and they also confessed their sins in public rather than in private.<sup>190</sup> This practice led to condemnation of the order by many Sufis and other religious leaders because confession of this sort is not an accepted practice in Islam.

The Qādiriyya order was the oldest and one of the most widespread. It was founded by a Ḥanbalite called 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jilāni (d. 1166) who studied in Bagdad.<sup>191</sup> It has also been

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<sup>185</sup> Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers, Leaders in Piety*, 133.

<sup>186</sup> Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers, Leaders in Piety*, 133.

<sup>187</sup> Winter, *Egyptian Society under Ottoman Rule*, 131.

<sup>188</sup> W.A.S. Khalidi, "al-Dasūqī, Burhān al-Dīn Ibrāhīm b. Abi 'l-Maḍīd 'Abdal-'Azīz, nicknamed Abu 'l-'Aynayn," *Encyclopedia of Islam* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2006 [database online], available from [http://www.brillonline.nl.proxy.lib.ohiostate.edu/subscriber/entry?entry=islam\\_SIM-1734](http://www.brillonline.nl.proxy.lib.ohiostate.edu/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-1734), internet, accessed 30 April 2011.

<sup>189</sup> Winter, *Egyptian Society under Ottoman Rule*, 142.

<sup>190</sup> Winter, *Egyptian Society under Ottoman Rule*, 142.

<sup>191</sup> Muḥammad Umar Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle against Popular Religion: with an Annotated Translation of his Kitāb iqtidā' aṣ-ṣirāt al-mustaqīm mukhālafat aṣḥāb al-jahīm* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1976), 62.

associated with the rise of the Ḥanbalī legal school in Greater Syria, though not all shaykhs of this order were Ḥanbalī.<sup>192</sup> Damascus eventually acquired a sizeable Ḥanbalī population due to the emigration of Ḥanbalīs from Jerusalem during the Crusades. Al-Jilāni emphasized piety and denial of worldly comforts but not extreme practices that were common in other orders.<sup>193</sup> His teachings did not go against Islamic law in any way, and his followers lived in society while still practicing Sufi teachings. This order was more compatible than many others with orthodox Sunni Islam and was considered peaceful.

The Qalandariyya (also called the Malāmatiyya) order began in Central Asia but spread west to Syria and Egypt by the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>194</sup> In the Mamlūk realm, the order enjoyed some success with the approval of a few of the Mamlūk sultans. Adherents were unconcerned with obeying the law and social conventions, which caused criticism.<sup>195</sup>

The Rifāʿīya order was founded by Aḥmad b. ʿAlī Abuʾl-ʿAbbās al-Rifāʿī (d. 1182), who lived in Iraq around the same time as al-Jilāni.<sup>196</sup> Unlike al-Jilāni's order, which fit into mainstream society, al-Rifāʿī's order was known for the fanatical devotion of its adherents and their rather outlandish public practices. They practiced a variety of extreme rituals, such as glass-eating, fire-walking, and interactions with a variety of dangerous animals, like snakes and lions, in order to show that their mystical devotion protected them from harm.<sup>197</sup> The Rifāʿī order was particularly popular in Syria during the early fourteenth century, though some scholars censured adherents for their extreme practices.

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<sup>192</sup> Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers, Leaders in Piety*, 134.

<sup>193</sup> Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle against Popular Religion*, 62.

<sup>194</sup> Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle against Popular Religion*: 61.

<sup>195</sup> Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle against Popular Religion*, 62.

<sup>196</sup> Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle against Popular Religion*, 62.

<sup>197</sup> Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle against Popular Religion*, 62.



The Samadī order was also present in Syria. They wanted to incorporate music into their dhikr, but this was unacceptable according to many orthodox believers.<sup>198</sup> However, two Syrian judges issued *fatwas* (legal opinions) stating that they could beat drums during their dhikr sessions because this was similar to the beating of the drum for military purposes.<sup>199</sup> Mamlūk amīrs of a certain rank incorporated military bands into their entourages; thus beating a drum rhythmically already had an accepted place in society.

The Shādhiliyya was a fairly large order present in North Africa, Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, and Syria. It was founded by the Maghribi mystic Abu 'l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Shādhilī (d. 1258).<sup>200</sup> He traveled to the eastern Mediterranean, where his followers, especially Abu 'l-'Abbās al-Mursī (d. 1287) and Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh (d. 1309), spread the order throughout the region.<sup>201</sup> This order was more urban than rural and largely concerned with people developing an inner life while still being active in the economic and political environments in which they lived.<sup>202</sup> Adherents were to blend into society. It discouraged antinomian behavior.<sup>203</sup> Because it also embraced Islamic law and orthodox forms of public worship, it was very popular among the citizens of medieval Egypt and Syria as it allowed them to take part in both traditional religion and Sufi mysticism. Many writers and poets came from this order.

The *harāfīsh*, which was likely associated with Sufi beggars, was not an order such as the ones listed above but instead a political/social phenomenon. They provoked social disorder by

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<sup>198</sup> Michael Winter, *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt: Studies in the Writings of 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Sha'rānī* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1982), 214.

<sup>199</sup> Winter, *Society and Religion in Early Ottoman Egypt*, 214.

<sup>200</sup> Denny, *An Introduction to Islam*, 242.

<sup>201</sup> Jonathan Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East, 600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 238.

<sup>202</sup> Winter, *Egyptian Society under Ottoman Rule*, 129.

<sup>203</sup> Berkey, *The Formation of Islam*, 238.

practicing bizarre rites and running through the cities like vagrants.<sup>204</sup> Their adherents were politically active, often supporting a particular ruler and even fighting on behalf of the Mamlūks.<sup>205</sup> Their connection to Sufi orders before the fifteenth century is tenuous, but by the later Middle Ages, there is more evidence that they were associated in some ways with the brotherhoods. By the fifteenth century, the harāfish were more organized, and the societies that they developed were probably mendicant dervish orders, according to Lapidus.<sup>206</sup> They still participated in official political functions. As the harāfish became organized under their leaders, whom they called sultans, they became responsible for some aspects of social life, such as giving alms to beggars and being a part of political processions.<sup>207</sup> The group was far less volatile by this point than it had been when it first developed. The harāfish show the varied form that Sufi orders could take as well as the broad cross-section of the populace they could attract.

Other urban groups, such as *futuwwa* organizations, came to resemble Sufi orders and may have even predisposed their members to participate in Sufism. They also were connected in some way to the harāfish.<sup>208</sup> The label *futuwwa* denotes a variety of urban movements for young men, often linked to specific crafts, that were often involved in the political, economic, and social life of a city. Lapidus comments on a guild of silk workers in Damascus that may have acted in the manner of a Sufi order but that probably originated as a *futuwwa* organization.<sup>209</sup> In one instance, in 1492, the fraternities organized around the silk economy banded together to

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<sup>204</sup> Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, 180.

<sup>205</sup> Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, 180.

<sup>206</sup> Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, 180.

<sup>207</sup> Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, 182.

<sup>208</sup> Claude Cahen, "Futuwwa," *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2006 [database online], available from [http://www.brillonline.nl.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/subscriber/entry?entry=islam\\_COM-0228](http://www.brillonline.nl.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_COM-0228), internet, accessed 9 May 2011.

<sup>209</sup> Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, 102.

protest a tax on silk, showing how their economic affiliation prompted them to political action.<sup>210</sup>

Other guilds, like that of the butchers, were also known to be associated with futuwwa.<sup>211</sup>

Gradually, futuwwa organizations adopted some Sufi features, such as *silsilas* (chains of mystical transmission) modeled after the Sufi tradition of connecting themselves to their teachers and to their teachers' teachers and finally back to the Prophet himself or one of his companions.<sup>212</sup> Sufi concepts and modes of organization influenced many popular urban movements, of which the harāfish and futuwwa organizations are two prominent examples.

### **Sufism and Islamic Education**

Sufi education was different from traditional education in several ways, yet also similar. Before the rise of Sufi orders, students wishing to learn mysticism had to go in search of masters, much like students seeking education in law or hadīth. A Sufi master was called a shaykh, as were other teachers, or alternatively a *murshid* (guide), but the student was a *faqīr* (literally, a poor person, one whose only wealth is God) or *murīd* (one who seeks enlightenment).<sup>213</sup> The masters were authorized to teach by tracing their knowledge to earlier shaykhs in a chain of mystical transmission known as a *silsila*, similar to the isnād of ḥadīth scholarship.

As stated above, students learning Islamic sciences were encouraged to connect themselves to multiple teachers versed in a variety of subjects. Sufi education, on the other hand, was marked by a student connecting himself or herself to one teacher. The relationship between them was more personal because in addition to learning lessons, the student was seeking

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<sup>210</sup> Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, 102.

<sup>211</sup> J. Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993; originally published Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 234.

<sup>212</sup> Cahen, "Futuwwa."

<sup>213</sup> Denny, *An Introduction to Islam*, 239.

to gain, as Denny terms it, the “superior wisdom and spiritual power of the master.”<sup>214</sup> It was the relationship of a mentor to a protégé, in which, when the disciple chose to embark on the Sufi path, he or she was “reborn” and led along the *tarīqa* by the master, who was responsible for the disciple’s education, morality, and most importantly, his spiritual growth.<sup>215</sup> As with traditional education, many writers use the analogy of a father and a son to describe this relationship. Denny further comments, “As the Sufis say in this connection, the *faqīr* must present himself to his shaykh as a corpse to the one who washes it before its final commitment to the grave.”<sup>216</sup> The shaykh was not to socialize with his disciples as if they were friends but instead treat them with respect and humility.<sup>217</sup> The disciple was responsible for learning proper manners and deferring to and respecting his shaykh.<sup>218</sup> The bond between the shaykh and the *faqīr* continued throughout their lifetimes instead of being terminated.

Sufi masters often taught the same subjects as shaykhs unaffiliated with the Sufi tradition. These subjects included *ḥadīth*, *fiqh*, juridical skills, and preaching, among others.<sup>219</sup> As Ohlander describes, “The very structure which shaped the production, transmission, and replication of religious knowledge in the *madrasas* was replicated in the complex of practices informing the Sufi *ribāṭ* (lodge where Sufis secluded themselves) and institutionalized, *ṭarīqa*-based Sufism more generally.”<sup>220</sup> When Sufi orders were connected to a certain craft or a trade (such as the previously mentioned butchers and silk workers), the students would also be taught the trade in addition to traditional Islamic sciences. The most prominent difference between the

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<sup>214</sup> Denny, *An Introduction to Islam*, 239.

<sup>215</sup> Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, 200-201.

<sup>216</sup> Denny, *An Introduction to Islam*, 239.

<sup>217</sup> Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, 203.

<sup>218</sup> Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, 215-216.

<sup>219</sup> Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, 28.

<sup>220</sup> Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, 29.

lessons taught to Sufi disciples and those taught to other students is that the disciples also learned the rituals of their orders and were spiritually trained by their masters.<sup>221</sup>

Sufis used many of the same texts as traditional scholars, with the Qur'ān and the ḥadīth as the chief focal points. They also, however, possessed biographical dictionaries of Sufis and texts devoted to Sufi theory and practice/behaviors.<sup>222</sup> As with traditional education, a text was best learned through direct contact with a shaykh, in which he transmitted the material orally by memory or with the text in hand. The student would then repeat the text back to his master in order to ensure its correctness and his or her own understanding.<sup>223</sup> A Sufi disciple would receive an ijāza once he had mastered the text. Sufi knowledge transmission included unwritten “texts,” as well, that were unique to the particular mystical order, such as the inculcation of a type of dhikr and the order's silsila.<sup>224</sup> A student would receive a license stating that he was qualified to pass on these types of knowledge as well.

It is difficult to determine the differences among Sufi institutions as many sources claim they are equivalent and they often seem to perform the same function. The ribāṭ was, by the 8<sup>th</sup> century, a place for Sufis to seclude themselves and reflect.<sup>225</sup> It arrived in Egypt during the Ayyūbid period and was supported by waqf. As will be discussed later, some ribāṭs were built to host women who did not have husbands or families to care for them, and these women were not necessarily Sufis themselves.<sup>226</sup> The ribāṭ was essentially a refuge for wandering Sufis or

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<sup>221</sup> Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, 28.

<sup>222</sup> Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, 48.

<sup>223</sup> Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, 53.

<sup>224</sup> Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, 55.

<sup>225</sup> Leonor Fernandes, *The Evolution of a Sufi Institution in Mamlūk Egypt: The Khānqāh* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1988), 10.

<sup>226</sup> Fernandes, *The Evolution of a Sufi Institution in Mamlūk Egypt*, 11.

sometimes those in need in the community. By the mid-fourteenth century, the zāwiya and the khānqāh, which will be discussed below, had absorbed the ribāṭ.<sup>227</sup>

The zāwiya was also introduced to Egypt during the Ayyūbid period, though shortly after the Arab conquest of Egypt, the term was used to refer to a specific part of a building where shaykhs and students would gather, and it was not specifically associated with Sufism.<sup>228</sup> Later, when it was associated with Sufism, it was known as a place where the shaykh of a Sufi order lived with his family, and after his death, it was the place of his burial.<sup>229</sup> Zāwiyas were built to help spread particular orders in the region, and they were open to anyone. They were not necessarily established by waqf – some were built by amīrs or existed because of donations.<sup>230</sup> After the shaykh's tomb was established there, the zāwiya became a shrine where people would go to receive blessings and commemorate his death annually with a festival. By the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the zāwiya and the khānqāh were becoming less distinct from one another.

The khānqāh was an official, often governmentally supported, foundation in which Sufis could live and perform their rituals, and it supported the mystics with stipends.<sup>231</sup> It was a complex with lodgings for students and shaykhs, a kitchen, a bathhouse, an ablution fountain, and sometimes others elements as well.<sup>232</sup> Like zāwiyas, khānqāhs often hosted tombs for the people who founded them. They were larger and more architecturally impressive than other Sufi institutions. The term “khānqāh” was first used by historians in the 10<sup>th</sup> century when referring to institutions in the eastern regions of the Islamic world, but details about these early khānqāhs

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<sup>227</sup> Fernandes, *The Evolution of a Sufi Institution in Mamlūk Egypt*, 12.

<sup>228</sup> Fernandes, *The Evolution of a Sufi Institution in Mamlūk Egypt*, 13.

<sup>229</sup> Fernandes, *The Evolution of a Sufi Institution in Mamlūk Egypt*, 14.

<sup>230</sup> Fernandes, *The Evolution of a Sufi Institution in Mamlūk Egypt*, 15.

<sup>231</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 56.

<sup>232</sup> Fernandes, *The Evolution of a Sufi Institution in Mamlūk Egypt*, 17.

are unclear.<sup>233</sup> The khānqāh was used primarily for Sufi rituals, and it was more selective in who could participate than the zāwiya. The Sufis in residence were controlled by the waqf that established the institution, and they had to live there full-time and complete religious duties that the waqf stipulated.<sup>234</sup> As well, a khānqāh was not built to popularize a particular order, nor was it controlled by an individual shaykh.<sup>235</sup> Unlike the madrasas, the early khānqāhs did not host classes, and likewise madrasas of that time did not host Sufi mystical activities. Ohlander asserts that it was during the Great Seljūk period (1038-1194) that Sufis and the ‘ulamā’ became connected through patronage of the ruling elite.<sup>236</sup>

During the Mamlūk era, in Damascus alone, over one hundred and fifty religious/educational institutions were either founded or repaired, and many Sufi convents are included in this number.<sup>237</sup> As well, in Jerusalem, Mamlūk rulers built many Sufi convents and other waqf foundations because of Jerusalem’s sacrosanct status for Muslims as the “third qibla” (the direction of prayer), after Mecca and Medina.<sup>238</sup> However, during the two and a half centuries of Mamlūk rule, madrasas and khānqāhs became less distinct, as can be seen by the presence of Sufi lecturers at some madrasas. Berkey explains this phenomenon by stating that the khānqāhs were unable to support the growing number of Sufis, causing many to gather elsewhere, including at madrasas.<sup>239</sup> Later, institutions, whether they had begun as khānqāhs or madrasas, started accommodating traditional education, Sufi ritual practices, or both at once. Chamberlain mentions that the ‘Ādiliyya and Taqawiyya madrasas in Damascus, which were

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<sup>233</sup> Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, 30.

<sup>234</sup> Fernandes, *The Evolution of a Sufi Institution in Mamlūk Egypt*, 18.

<sup>235</sup> Fernandes, *The Evolution of a Sufi Institution in Mamlūk Egypt*, 18.

<sup>236</sup> Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition*, 32.

<sup>237</sup> Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages*, 73.

<sup>238</sup> Ephrat, *Spiritual Wayfarers, Leaders in Piety*, 135.

<sup>239</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 58.

two of the most prominent madrasas of the Mamlūk era, had Sufi prayer leaders.<sup>240</sup> Lecturers could be Sufis as well, and Chamberlain comments that these individuals probably taught Sufism along with other topics.<sup>241</sup> By the late fifteenth century, the Mamlūk Sultanate was experiencing economic hardships for a variety of reasons, yet the patronage of Sufi rituals in these madrasas was not cut out of government expenditures.<sup>242</sup> Like the Friday sermon, the presence of Sufis and their rites was more than accepted; it was a standard part of educational and religious life.

### **Ibn Taymiyya**

However, this image of cooperation and unity can be a bit misleading. Competition and criticism existed between Sufis and other educators. Ibn Taymiyya represents this conflict well as he was a member of the ‘ulamā’ and seemingly a Sufi, yet he was highly critical of many common Sufi practices and concepts. He was also critical of his fellow ‘ulamā’ and would not hesitate to make his opinions known. His political activism and blunt approach made him many enemies, but he was one of the most influential members of the intellectual world at that time.

Ibn Taymiyya (1263-1328) was born in Ḥarrān in southeastern Anatolia during the period of the Mongol invasions.<sup>243</sup> It was because of the Mongol threat that he and his family moved to Damascus. He came from a family of scholars, so it was no surprise that he too became a scholar, a Ḥanbalī theologian and jurisconsult, and later took over his father’s position at the Sukkariyya madrasa.<sup>244</sup> In Damascus at the time, Ḥanbalīs were a minority as most of the city’s

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<sup>240</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 81.

<sup>241</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 84.

<sup>242</sup> Chamberlain, *Knowledge and Social Practice in Medieval Damascus*, 19.

<sup>243</sup> Henri Laoust, "Ibn Taymiyya, Takī al-Dīn Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2006 [database online], [http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam\\_SIM-3388](http://www.brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-3388), internet, accessed 19 January 2011 .

<sup>244</sup> Laoust, "Ibn Taymiyya."



‘ulamā’ were Shāfi‘ī.<sup>245</sup> In the course of his educational career, he became involved in politics. When the Mongols threatened Damascus in 1300, Ibn Taymiyya was one of the ‘ulamā’ who wanted to fight against them and not try to cater to their demands for peace.<sup>246</sup>

As an influential and outspoken figure, he acquired enemies who continually brought him before the religious authorities for various infractions, such as anthropomorphism. Most confronted him about his beliefs or actions, but some commented on his eccentric habits and character traits, such as his “pride, obstinacy, intolerance, captiousness, and lack of tact.”<sup>247</sup> He was often jailed or exiled to Cairo for his beliefs or actions, either because of his writings or as a result of his political activity. However, he was usually freed in short order by amīrs who favored him. His political involvement did not consist of rabble-rousing, as Michael Cook explains, but rather cooperation with the government.<sup>248</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya condemned other shaykhs for a variety of reasons, such as their suspected Mongol sympathies, monism (see below), and antinomianism.<sup>249</sup> He was strongly against what he considered unacceptable innovation to the Prophet’s custom (*bid‘a*) and spoke out against it on several occasions. Centuries after his death, Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1206/1792), a judge in the central Arabian peninsula, adopted many of his ideas, which led to the rise of Wahhābism.<sup>250</sup> The reactionary Ibn Taymiyya may seem the least likely sort of person to follow mystical traditions, yet he studied and was active in the fields of both philosophy and Sufism.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 146, <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/ohiostatelaw/docDetail.action?docID=10065749>.

<sup>246</sup> Laoust, “Ibn Taymiyya.”

<sup>247</sup> Donald Little, “Did Ibn Taymiyya Have a Screw Loose?” *Studia Islamica*, 41 (1975): 100, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1595400>, 93-111.

<sup>248</sup> Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong*, 150.

<sup>249</sup> Laoust, “Ibn Taymiyya.”

<sup>250</sup> Laoust, “Ibn Taymiyya.”

<sup>251</sup> Laoust, “Ibn Taymiyya.”

Though he was a Sufi (probably of the Qādiriyya order, although this is debated), Ibn Taymiyya was fiercely critical of many Sufi concepts, such as monism (the idea that there is one God who is manifested in different ways to different people or religions), antinomianism (the idea that religions contain laws or concepts no longer applicable to their adherents), and esotericism (spiritual searches for enlightenment). Ibn Taymiyya encouraged maintaining a distinction between the Creator and his creation, because losing the distinction between the two could negate differences in religion and could promote the idea that there are many different ways to God.<sup>252</sup> He strongly opposed Sufis who fasted for long periods, were celibate, or otherwise engaged in extreme physical practices or rituals (including consumption of wine or hashish).<sup>253</sup> He was also critical of people claiming to be Sufis who only kept to outward conventions without comprehending Sufism itself, or used Sufism to justify innovations.<sup>254</sup>

Ibn Taymiyya attempted to create a dogma based on tradition derived from the Qur'ān and the sunna of the Prophet, reason as used by the theologians, and free will, harmonizing and complementing each other.<sup>255</sup> Hikmet Yaman argues that Ibn Taymiyya promoted a more theological and legal brand of Sufism as opposed to a mystical one.<sup>256</sup> Often he would explain Sufi mystical concepts, and how they could be used, in rational terms. For example, he considered Sufi inspiration, *ilhām*, a form of *ijtihād*, or independent reasoning.<sup>257</sup> Ibn Taymiyya further argued that the Sufi concept of *kashf*, spiritual unveiling, could be used to help believers

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<sup>252</sup> Memon, *Ibn Taymiyya's Struggle against Popular Religion*, 45.

<sup>253</sup> Hikmet Yaman, "Hanbalite Criticism of Sufism: Ibn Taymiyya (d. 795/1328), a Hanbalite Ascetic (*Zāhid*)," *Ekev Academic Review* (2010): 48, <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?hid=22&sid=2d0be2ca-1491-49fa-ae93-d1c7f615f6aa%40sessionmgr13&vid=2>, 37-56.

<sup>254</sup> Yaman, "Hanbalite Criticism of Sufism," 52.

<sup>255</sup> Laoust, "Ibn Taymiyya."

<sup>256</sup> Yaman, "Hanbalite Criticism of Sufism," 39.

<sup>257</sup> Yaman, "Hanbalite Criticism of Sufism," 46.

understand concepts that they could not comprehend through simple human reasoning.<sup>258</sup> He thought that Sufis should not isolate themselves but rather be contributing members of society; there had to be a balance between Sufi activities and worldly ones.

Included in Ibn Taymiyya's criticism of innovation were many popular practices, such as popular festivals. Many of these festivals had roots in ancient practices of the region, and people enjoyed taking part in them. As well, many rituals connected with the festivals, such as coloring eggs for the Persian new year, had roots in other religions. Even festivals that seemed Islamic he deemed inappropriate, such as celebrations of the birth of the Prophet Muḥammad, because the exact date of the Prophet's birth is unknown and celebrations sometimes occurred around the same time as the Christian Christmas.<sup>259</sup> His definition of a "festival" was quite broad, encompassing even indirect actions that Muslims might perform that could relate to an un-Islamic festival.<sup>260</sup> Ibn Taymiyya saw festivals and the rituals associated with them as promoting polytheism (*shirk*), especially the worship of saints and visitation of tombs.<sup>261</sup> Tomb visitation was a particular concern of his, as he lived much of his life in Damascus, where many tombs and visitation sites were located, many of which were of dubious authenticity.<sup>262</sup> Ibn Taymiyya explains, "It is wholly un-Islamic to venerate in any way these places which popular belief has invested with a specialty whatever it be."<sup>263</sup> The tombs that were verified to be those of prophets or other righteous individuals could be visited, but one had to follow specific protocol for doing

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<sup>258</sup> Yaman, "Hanbalīte Criticism of Sufism," 47.

<sup>259</sup> Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle against Popular Religion*, 13.

<sup>260</sup> Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle against Popular Religion*, 11.

<sup>261</sup> Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle against Popular Religion*, 5.

<sup>262</sup> Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle against Popular Religion*, 15.

<sup>263</sup> Memon, *Ibn Taimīya's Struggle against Popular Religion*, 258.

so and not go beyond what was appropriate. Ibn Taymiyya considered doing otherwise to be heresy.<sup>264</sup>

By making strident statements on these matters, Ibn Taymiyya went against popular practice of the time. Many enjoyed the festivals and rituals associated with them, yet he considered them an innovation that could lead one away from God. At the same time, he agreed with many Sufi practices, as long as they were not extreme and permitted adherents to live normally in society and follow Islamic law. His rationalization of Sufism to allow it to be better incorporated into mainstream Islamic society was combined with his criticism of his peers, both Sufi and non-Sufi. Ibn Taymiyya best represents the overlap between Sufi and traditional education, and the struggle that resulted from mingling one with the other.

## **Conclusion**

Sufi education fostered intellectual relationships that were more personal than those resulting from traditional education. It involved a deep, lifelong relationship in which the shaykh transmitted mystical knowledge as a part of education. As Sufism spread and its institutions increased in number, many people had access to Sufi rituals and ideas; traditions such as saint veneration and visiting tombs arose out of this. The gradual combining of Sufi khānqāhs and madrasas helped make Sufism more accessible, such that it acted as a connection between the Mamlūk rulers, who endowed the institutions in which Sufi shaykhs worked; the ‘ulamā’, many of whom were Sufis; and the populace, who enjoyed the rituals and festivals associated with Sufism. However, considerable criticism and competition existed among scholars, many of

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<sup>264</sup> Memon, *Ibn Taimīya’s Struggle against Popular Religion*, 15.

whom, like Ibn Taymiyya, thought that many of the common practices associated with Sufism were un-Islamic and desired to reconcile Sufism with traditional orthodox Islam.

## Chapter 5: Women and Education

The sources say very little about Mamlūk women, surprising since sources from the Seljuk period, immediately preceding the Mamlūk Sultanate, and from the Ottoman period, immediately following, mention them more frequently. However, the history of the Mamlūk Sultanate essentially begins with a woman, the Sultana Shajrat al-Durr, whose short reign was a catalyst for the change from Ayyūbid to Mamlūk rule in Egypt and Greater Syria. In order to determine women's place in the Mamlūk intellectual sphere, one must turn to the brief mentions of them in primary and secondary literature, and to accounts from the Seljūks or Ottomans. By doing so, one can see women's presence in intellectual life and the relationships formed within this sphere through waqf foundation, public study circles at madrasas, the practice of women teaching one another, and ḥadīth transmission.

### Women's Roles

Shajrat al-Durr (d. 1257), as the first Sultana of the Mamlūk Sultanate, is one of the few women mentioned in the sources. Any study of women during this time must include some mention of her and her role in the initial formation of the sultanate. She was the Turkish wife of al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb, the last Ayyūbid ruler. When he died, she took over the throne and proceeded to legitimize her reign by spurring the Mamlūk armies to a victory over the French Crusaders in 1250.<sup>265</sup> She attempted to persuade her deceased husband's son, Tūrānshāh, to take the throne, but he came into conflict with the officers in the army and was assassinated.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Fatima Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 28.

<sup>266</sup> Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, 91.

The ‘Abbāsīd caliph, al-Musta‘īm, refused to recognize her reign as she was a woman, but she did have the support of the army, an army that had recently been successful, under her indirect leadership, against the Crusaders. However, her reign did not last as the powerful Bahri Mamlūks decided that they needed the caliph to confirm their reign, and thus she was deposed.<sup>267</sup> Incredibly, she did not fade into the background but instead sought to marry the Mamlūk whom the Bahris put forward as the next ruler, ‘Izz al-Dīn Aybak. She was intelligent and wished to use her skills for the betterment of the sultanate. However, when she heard that her husband sought to marry another woman, she had him murdered while he was in the bath, leading to her own execution for the crime.<sup>268</sup> An intelligent and cunning woman, she set a precedent that other women of Mamlūk society might presumably have followed, yet mention of these women is scarce.

Most Mamlūk women are described primarily for their marriage alliances. For example, the daughter of Sultan Qalāwūn (r. 1277- 1290), Ghāziya Khātūn, is mentioned in early Mamlūk chronicles in connection with her marriage to Baybars’ son, al-Malik al-Sa‘īd.<sup>269</sup> She was thus an integral part of the agreement made between two powerful Mamlūks of the time. Women of Mongol descent were especially prized as marriage partners during the thirteenth century because of their reputed beauty, and there are several records of Mamlūk Sultans being enchanted with these women.<sup>270</sup> Occasionally senior imperial women were sent to negotiate political compromises. In 1279, two years after Baybars’ death, Qalāwūn and his son-in-law, al-Malik al-Sa‘īd, and their respective Mamlūk factions were vying for power. Al-Malik al-Sa‘īd,

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<sup>267</sup> Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, 91.

<sup>268</sup> Merissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*, 98.

<sup>269</sup> Linda Northrup, *From Slave to Sultan: The Career of Al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn and the Consolidation of Mamlūk Rule in Egypt and Syria (678-689 A.H./1279-1290 A.D.)* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998), 75.

<sup>270</sup> Northrup, *From Slave to Sultan*, 116-117.

instead of meeting with Qalāwūn himself, sent his mother to discuss a compromise.<sup>271</sup> Qalāwūn would have respected her because she was the wife or concubine of his old comrade-in-arms, Baybars. Thus, women did fulfill political roles, though more often than not in a passive manner, through marriage alliances.

Women, though they were supposed to be in contact only with their male relatives or husbands, did interact to some degree with the male sphere. Those who were widowed or divorced, or who for other reasons could not rely on male family members to provide for them, had to seek social services outside the home.<sup>272</sup> At times, they had to go before the judge (*qāḍī*) or other official in order to secure their rights or obtain some form of welfare. Other women possessed property or wealth, either from gifts, dowries, charity, or an inheritance, that impelled them to participate in public economic life.<sup>273</sup> According to S. D. Goitein, “[Women] receive as a gift or donate, inherit or bequeath, buy or sell, rent or lease houses (more often parts of houses), stores, workshops, flour mills, and other types of urban real estate, and also take care of their maintenance.”<sup>274</sup>

Women also traveled, sometimes with their husbands or families and sometimes without. When family members lived in different cities or regions, women would often travel to see them or to help if someone was ill or expecting a child.<sup>275</sup> They also visited shrines frequently, though often in the company of their families, unless they were of advanced age.<sup>276</sup> Older women had more freedom to travel, whether it was on personal business to visit a shrine or tomb or whether

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<sup>271</sup> Northrup, *From Slave to Sultan*, 79.

<sup>272</sup> S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, vol. 3: *The Family* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 324.

<sup>273</sup> Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, vol. 3, 324.

<sup>274</sup> Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, vol. 3, 326.

<sup>275</sup> Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, vol. 3, 337.

<sup>276</sup> Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, vol. 3, 337.



it was to see family, because they were past marrying age. In their hometowns, women would visit the homes of their friends, go to women's bathhouses, attend services at the mosque, attend weddings and other celebrations, and help the sick.<sup>277</sup> Elite women would even go outside the city to receive brides who were coming to wed other elite members of society, and women went to the mosques (though they sat in segregated sections) and went before the judge.<sup>278</sup>

Since women could own property, they could also endow and administer religious institutions, such as mosques, madrasas, hospices for women, and mausoleums.<sup>279</sup> Often women who were a part of the royal family had the wealth and prestige necessary to construct an institution. In Cairo, several madrasas were established by women, such as the Ḥijāziyya, founded by the daughter of Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad and named after her husband, the Mamlūk Baktimur al-Ḥijāzī.<sup>280</sup> She also had a tomb built on site for her own burial. Syria had even more educational institutions founded by women than Egypt.<sup>281</sup> Women could also be buried in the tombs of their relatives who had founded institutions. Sometimes, when a relative founded a school or a like institution, he would stipulate that his female relatives as well as his male relatives be put in charge of administering the school, so cases exist in which women handled the finances and appointments to positions of a certain school.<sup>282</sup> For example, in Damascus in the late fifteenth century, Zaynab bint Shams al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī established a waqf that, even after a century, was administered by her female descendents.<sup>283</sup> Often, a man would

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<sup>277</sup> Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, vol. 3, 343.

<sup>278</sup> Carole Hillenbrand, "Seljuq Women," in *The Balance of Truth: Essays in Honour of Professor Geoffrey Lewis*, ed. Çiğdem Balım-Harding and Colin Imber (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2000), 154.

<sup>279</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 163.

<sup>280</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 163.

<sup>281</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 164.

<sup>282</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 165.

<sup>283</sup> Winter, "Mamlūks and their Households in Late Mamlūk Damascus," 310.

establish a waqf to provide for his wife, female slaves (with whom he had had children), or children in the future.

## **Women in Education**

The idea of educating women was controversial in medieval Islam. On one hand, the Prophet Muḥammad is said to have addressed women and tried to improve their place in society.<sup>284</sup> As well, a ḥadīth attributed to him claims that every Muslim, presumably regardless of gender, must seek knowledge.<sup>285</sup> Some scholars advocated for women's education, so that they could learn more about the religion and so that they could teach their children from an early age. As well, there were many social issues that were regulated by religion, and women needed to know what these were and how to function in society as the religion dictated. Others thought that women's education would encourage impropriety, especially if women learned to write and could therefore, in theory, send letters to paramours and engage in similarly suspect activities.<sup>286</sup> Co-education would encourage the mixing of genders, deemed dangerous and not conducive to study.<sup>287</sup> Some scholars even argued that women should not go to the mosque for the distraction to men they would provide.<sup>288</sup> As mentioned above, young men were encouraged not to marry while they were pursuing their studies because of the responsibilities and distractions a wife and children presented. However, in practice, this injunction was not often followed. Like the Mamlūks, women had to overcome a variety of obstacles in order to become learned, though in

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<sup>284</sup> Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, vol. 3, 322.

<sup>285</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 161.

<sup>286</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 162.

<sup>287</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 166.

<sup>288</sup> Hillenbrand, "Seljuq Women," 147.

their case it was social restrictions whereas in the case of Mamlūks it was a linguistic and cultural barrier.

Women were rarely active in schools, and not a single one held a post at any educational institution, except occasionally as an administrator, as stated earlier.<sup>289</sup> Women could not officially be students, either, as the professions for which they would be trained – in law, religion, or bureaucracy – were closed to them.<sup>290</sup> As well, education relied heavily on the close intellectual relationship fostered between a student and a teacher, and women are not described in the sources as having had that sort of relationship with male teachers or students.<sup>291</sup> Women were not to be put in any position that required that they be dominant over men, including that of teacher. However, as the madrasa spread throughout the Muslim world, many people who were not formally enrolled as students had the opportunity to attend various functions, such as lectures and ḥadīth recitations.<sup>292</sup> Women were sometimes seen at these events, such as smaller teaching circles, though it is uncertain how often this occurred and whether it was widely accepted. There is some evidence of women teaching informally at these madrasas as well. In Damascus, Sitt al-Qudāt bint Abī Bakr ibn Zurayq (15<sup>th</sup> century) is reported to have recited (probably ḥadīth) in front of an audience which included her granddaughter.<sup>293</sup> Ḥadīth transmission was one of the areas in which women are relatively frequently encountered as scholars. Society at large, from the royal Mamlūks to the common people, valued ḥadīth. The way it was transmitted allowed women, who were barred from many other aspects of public life, to join in. Sufism was likewise

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<sup>289</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 165.

<sup>290</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 166.

<sup>291</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 179.

<sup>292</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 169.

<sup>293</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 171.

more open toward allowing women into its intellectual world, and women reportedly served as Sufi shaykhas at mosques, albeit small ones.<sup>294</sup>

Though there is some evidence of women teaching mixed-gender classes, learned women more often taught other women in the home. They were responsible for teaching women their duties as Muslims and about Islam in general. One woman is said to have turned her house into “a gathering place for divorced and widowed women, devoted to the instruction of young girls.”<sup>295</sup> Some institutions, known by the Sufi term *ribāṭ*, indicating a sort of hostel, were established to house women, especially widows or women without families, and they also provided religious instruction, including jurisprudence.<sup>296</sup> They may have been connected to nearby madrasas, though this is unclear.<sup>297</sup> The women were housed and taught there only until they remarried, so it was not a permanent solution leading to women living on their own as intellectuals. Learned women were also sought after by their female counterparts during religious festivals to recite the Qur’ān or read stories.<sup>298</sup>

Women who grew up in the homes of prominent ‘ulamā’ families had a distinct advantage in that their relative(s) could educate them in the home. For example, Zaynab al-Ṭukhitta’s (d. 1388) family taught her the Qur’ān, how to write, grammar, and works on Shāfi‘ī jurisprudence, and when she was married, her husband taught her ḥadīth.<sup>299</sup> Women like this often learned introductory texts, and if they were capable and desired it, they could move on to more advanced texts. Some women, like Takiya bint Ghaith (d. 1184) of Syria, were more inclined toward the arts. She wrote poetry and was renowned for some of her verses. She also

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<sup>294</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 175.

<sup>295</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 173.

<sup>296</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 173.

<sup>297</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 174.

<sup>298</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 173.

<sup>299</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 170.

came from a prominent family; both her father and son were influential members of the ‘ulamā’.<sup>300</sup>

Of course, not all women were raised in households such as Zaynab al-Ṭukhitta’s with men capable of teaching difficult texts. Those who wanted knowledge outside of what their husbands or families could provide were allowed to leave their homes to seek out knowledge, according to an injunction by Qāḍī Khān (12<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>301</sup> However, husbands were supposed to be the first to take responsibility for the education of their wives.<sup>302</sup> Women were allowed to receive ijāzas, and there are records that indicate that girls were taken at a young age to listen to a shaykh. As mentioned above, in order to receive an ijāza, a student was supposed to either read or hear a text from a shaykh, but often students were able to receive licenses without ever hearing the text or even meeting the shaykh. Thus, there are records of women receiving ijāzas because of their relation to a certain family member who actually did go to hear the text, or receiving ijāzas at a young age.<sup>303</sup> For example, Sāra (d. 1403), the daughter of the judge Taqī al-Dīn ‘Alī al-Subkī, received ijāzas from shaykhs in both Cairo and Damascus before the age of four.<sup>304</sup>

Other women must have mingled with men to some extent in their learning or transmission of ḥadīth because there are records of them teaching or attending sessions with particular shaykhs. Scholars such as Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505) include women in their lists of people from whom they heard ḥadīth, and of the 130 shaykhs al-Suyūṭī lists, thirty-three were

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<sup>300</sup> Ibn Khallikān, *Ibn Khallikān’s Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 1, 277.

<sup>301</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 170.

<sup>302</sup> Hillenbrand, “Seljuk Women,” 149.

<sup>303</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 177.

<sup>304</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 170.

women.<sup>305</sup> A woman could, like a man, achieve notoriety as a ḥadīth transmitter if he or she were the only surviving person to have heard a prominent shaykh recite or had received an ijāza from him.<sup>306</sup> This was achieved by parents taking young children to listen to older scholars so that, as the children grew, they might become the sole transmitters from that shaykh and thus achieve a great deal of notoriety and respect.<sup>307</sup> One excellent example of a woman achieving prominence as a ḥadīth transmitter is ‘Ā’isha (early 14<sup>th</sup> century), the daughter of Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī. She was born in Damascus and was brought before a shaykh at the age of four to hear ḥadīth.<sup>308</sup> She spent the rest of her life seeking knowledge, mastering other ḥadīth collections and obtaining ijāzas from scholars in Aleppo, Hama, Nablus, and Hebron, until she became known as the “*muḥadditha* [female reciter of ḥadīth] of Damascus”.<sup>309</sup> As she grew older, she became the only person to have heard ḥadīth from several shaykhs due to the early beginning of her education, and many sought her out to learn from her. Other women like ‘Ā’isha also attained prominent roles in society in this way.

## Conclusion

It is difficult to speak of distinct trends in women’s education and how the relationships among groups of women and between women and men would have appeared to contemporary society. If a woman was learned and well-known for her learning, she was most likely noted in the major narrative sources, like Ibn Khallikan’s biographical dictionary. However, because women existed largely in a separate sphere from that of men, one cannot be certain of the extent

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<sup>305</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 176.

<sup>306</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 177.

<sup>307</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 177.

<sup>308</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 177.

<sup>309</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 177.

of the study circles that often met in their homes and how learned they were. By looking at a few prominent individuals, women's establishment and administration of waqf, women in the madrasa, and their participation – and relative success – in ḥadīth transmission, we can, however, ascertain that women were involved in the intellectual life of the Mamlūk Sultanate, though the exact extent of this participation may never be known.

## Chapter 6: Education among the Common People

In medieval Islamic society, there was a distinction between the educated elite and the uneducated masses. By the late Mamlūk period, however, many scholars feared that the general quality of education was decreasing, and that the ‘ulamā’ were more concerned with their outward appearance (e.g., special clothing) than with their learning.<sup>310</sup> Some scholars wrote of people claiming to be members of the ‘ulamā’ who were less than knowledgeable about their supposed fields of expertise.<sup>311</sup> Others were simply lax in their teaching. If this was the case, what was to stop a person from dressing as a member of the ‘ulamā’ and attempting to seek a position at a school based on appearance alone?<sup>312</sup> This extreme example denotes the concern that some of the educated class were insufficiently competent and therefore that the boundaries between the educated elite and the masses were being breached by unqualified people seeking teaching positions. Scholars feared that opening education to all would decrease its quality. Even so, the populace at large had ways to access education and become a part of intellectual life through participating in activities at and taking jobs in educational institutions, through ḥadīth transmission, and through popular preaching.

### The Public Functions of Educational Institutions

During the Mamlūk period, as was noted above, the madrasa system became exceptionally fluid. In addition to becoming intertwined with Sufi institutions, madrasas became more open to the public life surrounding them. They were places of prayer, worship, and pious

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<sup>310</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 184.

<sup>311</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 185.

<sup>312</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 184.



works in addition to being places of learning.<sup>313</sup> Many madrasa complexes included mosques that were open to the public for daily prayers and Friday sermons, and often waqf deeds would stipulate that *imāms* (prayer leaders) and *muezzins* (people who call the populace to prayer) be employed there.<sup>314</sup> They also often paid people to recite the Qurʾān for both the benefit of those buried on the grounds of the madrasa and any visitors.<sup>315</sup> Additionally, madrasas often served as sites for the convening of *sharīʿa* courts, where judges heard a variety of cases, issued judgments, and wrote marriage contracts, business contracts, and many other kinds of legal documents.<sup>316</sup> They were also used for charitable works, such as providing food and clothing to the poor.

People who were not enrolled as students were not barred from attending lectures or being a part of study circles formed in the madrasa. Though, as stated, there was concern with the breakdown of the traditional separation between the ‘ulamā’ and the populace at large, the madrasa was not to be an institution only for the intellectual elite. Most scholars agreed that the populace was to be allowed to take part in its functions.<sup>317</sup> The ‘ulamā’ were responsible, at least officially, for educating the people on religion and religious duties, and thus some schools hired people to teach writing and the Qurʾān.<sup>318</sup> Many madrasas were also attached to primary schools that taught these subjects to children.

The *qāriʾ al-kursī* was a person hired by an educational institution to instruct the populace on the religious sciences from books that were simpler than most used in a madrasa.<sup>319</sup>

The people who attended these instructional sessions would often give donations or pay a small

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<sup>313</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 189.

<sup>314</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 190-191.

<sup>315</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 192-193.

<sup>316</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 191.

<sup>317</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 202-203.

<sup>318</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 203.

<sup>319</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 205.

fee to the person, often a minor scholar, who taught the lessons.<sup>320</sup> Some scholars spent their free time in positions such as this. As well, an official post developed at some madrasas called a *mī'ād* (appointment) in which someone would read texts, which were often explicated and commented upon by a shaykh.<sup>321</sup> This would occur at a set time and on a set day, and it would allow the people access to basic texts, such as ḥadīth. The person who filled this post had to be educated, and some waqf deeds required that the person be a teacher and a jurisconsult (*mufī*).<sup>322</sup> On the other hand, at times a *mī'ād* coincided with popular preaching, which will be discussed later, and the person giving the lesson may not have been the most academically qualified. For example, Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. 'Umar (d. 1428-29) led *mī'ād* sessions at al-Azhar mosque in Cairo and *zāwiyas* in both Cairo and Damascus.<sup>323</sup> However, he is otherwise recorded as a popular preacher, showing that there existed some fluidity between the two professions.

Waqf deeds often stipulated that various posts be created to fulfill the educational institution's more public duties. The people in these positions were often not as educated as those who were employed as teachers or students, yet they occupied important roles either supporting the academic functions of the madrasa or providing public services. As stated, most madrasas would employ an imām, muezzins, and Qur'ān readers. To preach the Friday sermon, they would employ a *khaṭīb*.<sup>324</sup> Although these people were educated, many had not reached the high level of learning of a shaykh, though at times a shaykh would also be employed in one of these positions in addition to teaching.<sup>325</sup> Essentially, these posts were usually open to minor scholars as opposed to prominent ones, who would be offered positions as teachers. Madrasas

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<sup>320</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 206.

<sup>321</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 206.

<sup>322</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 209.

<sup>323</sup> Jonathan Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2001), 38.

<sup>324</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 194.

<sup>325</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 195.

also provided for librarians (*khāzin al-kutub*) who were to maintain the books on the premises and sometimes even perform basic housekeeping.<sup>326</sup> Sometimes a student would be given this position in order to make additional money. Other positions required even less education. Often madrasas employed assistants to holders of various positions, primary school teachers, scribes, and others.<sup>327</sup> Each madrasa also employed a *bawwāb* (gatekeeper) to make sure that any unkempt or rowdy persons were kept out of the complex. Menial positions included cleaners, people to look after the candles and incense burners, and others.<sup>328</sup> There are records of people in some of these positions studying various subjects in the madrasas at which they worked. Thus, a large number of people were employed in madrasas across the Mamlūk Sultanate who were on the periphery of, yet could still take part in, the intellectual scene.

### **Ḥadīth Transmission**

The urban populace took part in ḥadīth transmission, much like the Mamlūk elite and women in general did. These groups were each disconnected from the educated elite to some extent, yet ḥadīth transmission offered them a way to engage in intellectual life. Naturally, formal study and memorization of ḥadīth necessitated enrollment in a madrasa, but listening to people recite it became a form of worship and communal activity for the people at large. Often people who became popular reciters would be minor members of the ‘ulamā’, like the qāri’ al-kursī or the person holding a mī’ād post. Scholars just launching their careers might also begin with public ḥadīth recitation before seeking more lucrative positions. Ḥadīth was recited during times of crisis, such as when Aleppo was besieged by the Mongols in the 15<sup>th</sup> century or during

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<sup>326</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 197.

<sup>327</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 198.

<sup>328</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 199.

outbreaks of the plague, as a part of a plea to God for safety.<sup>329</sup> It was also recited during celebrations and ceremonies, such as during the holy month of Ramaḍān. Those who listened to public recitations of popular collections of ḥadīth, such as al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, sometimes even received ijāzas.<sup>330</sup> Thus, they could become a part of transmitting ḥadīth and thus a part of the greater intellectual world to an extent.

### Popular Preachers and Storytellers

In the streets, the populace could listen to the *quṣṣāṣ*, people who recited the Qur'ān, told stories of the Prophet or the early Muslim community, or gave simple religious lessons.<sup>331</sup> These stories overlapped to some extent with what was taught in the madrasa. For example, there was a connection between *tafsīr* (Qur'ānic exegesis) and stories told by preachers in that both desired to fill in the gaps or add to the Qur'ānic message. The *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* (stories of the prophets) literature developed because of this aspiration, both from storytellers and renowned scholars. Storytellers excelled in telling of prophets like Moses and Joseph, often using *Isrā'īliyyāt* literature (stories from Jewish and Christian traditions) to flesh out their narratives.<sup>332</sup> Preachers also frequently told stories of the Prophet and his companions. They discussed themes such as the benefit of renouncing worldly goods, suffering, and judgment, and they could produce strong reactions in their audiences with their impassioned sermons.<sup>333</sup> Though scholars often looked down on storytellers for their exaggerations and tried to draw distinctions between high learning

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<sup>329</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 211.

<sup>330</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 215.

<sup>331</sup> Berkey, *The Transmission of Knowledge in Medieval Cairo*, 204.

<sup>332</sup> Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East*, 40-41.

<sup>333</sup> Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East*, 50.

and that of popular preachers, these preachers fulfilled a need in the people for a connection to religious education.

Quṣṣāṣ emerged relatively early in Islamic history. Some were appointed to official positions in an effort by the government to control them, but many were not. As numerous preachers wandered from place to place, they were difficult to control, in spite of government efforts to do so or scholarly injunctions on the matter. Thus, a considerable amount of tension existed between the government, which was highly influenced by the ‘ulamā’, and the popular preachers. They were often highly regarded among the people, for entertainment, edification, and imparting an understanding of the religion, and they could preach messages with social or political implications. As a result, sometimes they cultivated relationships with authority figures, like Mamūk amīrs, in order to gain support, and the amīrs gained legitimacy with the people by supporting their favorite preachers. On the other hand, some used their popularity to speak out against the government or the elite.<sup>334</sup>

Some scholars, while attempting to impose regulations on preachers, encouraged the work that they did within the community, rightly stating that these preachers could reach out to more people than the high ‘ulamā’, and thus the work that they performed had much value for the building up of the Islamic community.<sup>335</sup> However, many members of the ‘ulamā’ heavily criticized the preachers, stating that they preyed on gullible crowds in order to spread false or exaggerated stories.<sup>336</sup> As well, they were said to misrepresent ḥadīth, thus distorting the words of the Prophet, something that traditional scholars found reprehensible. Many also thought that, because people of all types went to listen to preachers, it would break down the carefully-

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<sup>334</sup> Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East*, 61.

<sup>335</sup> Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East*, 24.

<sup>336</sup> Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East*, 27.

constructed gender boundaries as men and women mixed with a degree of freedom in the crowds.<sup>337</sup> A woman could even become one of these preachers, especially in the realm of ḥadīth transmission, as mentioned above. Some scholars found this trend dangerous as it put women above men.

As with many other aspects of education in medieval Islam, popular preaching became intertwined with Sufism. Initially, however, Sufis were fervently opposed to popular preachers and storytellers, wishing to draw a distinction between the learning of their orders and the preaching these men did that was open to anyone.<sup>338</sup> However, in later centuries, there are several records of preachers associated with various Sufi orders, such as Ibn Bint Maylaq (d. 1395), who was a Shādhilī Sufi and also a popular preacher.<sup>339</sup> Others, such as Ibn Taymiyya, continued to oppose popular preaching, considering it an innovation and a misrepresentation of the truth. However, there was a distinct connection between common Sufi themes of suffering, love, poverty, and asceticism and those of popular preachers, showing just how much Sufism had penetrated society at large.<sup>340</sup>

## Conclusion

The educational world was not completely fluid, and the conditions of one's birth often helped to determine the type and amount of education one would receive. The 'ulamā' could come from a variety of backgrounds, but they desired to separate themselves from the masses out of fear that their profession would lose quality if it were opened to everyone. They often gave their friends and family members posts in educational institutions, perpetrating their own status

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<sup>337</sup> Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East*, 31.

<sup>338</sup> Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East*, 27.

<sup>339</sup> Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East*, 26.

<sup>340</sup> Berkey, *Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East*, 50.

as an elite group. However, the populace did have access to education. The institutions that existed offered a variety of services to the public, from jobs to informal classes to charitable works. People could attend public recitations of ḥadīth or listen to popular preachers. Thus, education was more diverse than it seems at first glance, and it could potentially be open to anyone.

## Conclusion

Education and educational institutions permeated medieval Syrian society. The breadth and depth of the relationships that formed because of education were a direct result of how knowledge was transmitted. Coming from an oral culture that had existed for centuries before the rise of the Mamlūk Sultanate, the society of Mamlūk Syria, in spite of their use of books and other written texts, relied upon oral transmission for the dissemination of knowledge.

Traditional madrasa education was based upon face-to-face interactions between the student and teacher, leading to mutual respect and quasi-familial bonds of loyalty and love. However, students were not tied to their schools; instead, they traveled, seeking knowledge from a variety of shaykhs to complete their education. Teachers, too, developed bonds with one another that allowed them to visit one another, attend each other's lectures, and gain benefit from one another.

The ruling elite and the 'ulamā' developed a relationship of dependency and mutual benefit, though some power struggles did exist between the two. The 'ulamā' could act as a bridge between the rulers and the populace, and the Mamlūks had the wealth to build educational institutions for the support of the scholars. The Mamlūks gained some Islamic education as a part of their military training, and they found that endowing educational institutions, participating in ḥadīth transmission, and their children's' careers as scholars gave them entrée into the Arabophone society over which they ruled. Meanwhile, the regional notables used education to benefit themselves socially, forming relationships with other powerful families and becoming revered members of the 'ulamā'. They, too, connected with and benefited from the Mamlūk waqf endowments.



The Mamlūks were also involved with various Sufi orders as they were often more inclusive in their membership. Sufi education fostered an even deeper relationship between the teacher and the student than the madrasa did, for the student was to learn from his shaykh for the rest of his life. Though there were differences and similarities between traditional madrasa and Sufi education, the institutions that accommodated these two types of education became more fluid toward the end of the Mamlūk period, and Sufism became more prevalent in society in general, so much so that Sufi rituals were a necessary part of the functions of various religious institutions. Sufism attracted people from all classes and groups, including women, the common people, Mamlūks, and members of the ‘ulamā’, allowing them to form relationships with one another within this realm though they may not ordinarily have interacted with one another.

Little is known about the lives of women and the non-elite populace, though we can infer some information. Both were involved in activities open to the public, such as lectures, study circles, and charity hosted by the madrasa. This brought them in contact with the ‘ulamā’ and other members of society with whom they would undoubtedly have little contact otherwise. They were also involved in Sufism and the transmission of ḥadīth. For women, the latter activity allowed them to become learned while not having to interact with men as much as they would if they were enrolled in madrasas, which virtually none was at this time. For the populace, ḥadīth transmission was a communal activity that gave them a place in intellectual life. As well, both groups benefit from the popular preachers and storytellers who operated outside the mosques and on the streets of the major cities.

Education by no means made Islamic society completely fluid. The ‘ulamā’ attempted to perpetuate itself as an elite class; the Mamlūk elite allowed no one, not even their own children, into their ranks; and women and the common people were largely barred from higher education

due to their relatively lowly status in society. However, intellectual relationships could and did form among all of these classes and groups because of the way knowledge was transmitted and the variety of ways in which one could gain access to knowledge. This study has sought to shed light on the rich intellectual culture of medieval Syria through an analysis of such relationships, though much work remains to bring this unique period of Islamic history fully to light.

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